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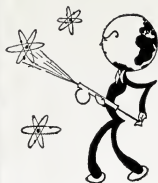


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lone star planet

by . . . H. BEAM PIPER

and

JOHN J. McGUIRE

The problem before the Court was whether the late Ambassador of the Solar League had been engaged in politics.

THEY started giving me the business as soon as I came into the Secretary's outer office. There was Ethel K'wang-Li, the Secretary's receptionist, at her desk. There was Courtlant Staynes, the assistant secretary to the Undersecretary for Economic Penetration, and Norman Gazarian, from Protocol, and Toby Lawder, from Humanoid Peoples' Affairs, and Raoul Chavier, and Hans Mannteufel, and Olga Reznik. It was a wonder there weren't more watching the condemned man's march to the gibbet; the word that the Secretary had called me in must have gotten all over the Department since the offices opened.

"Ah, Mr. Machiavelli, I presume," Ethel kicked off.

"Machiavelli, Junior," Olga picked up the ball. "That's the way he signs it."

"Well, I'm glad some of you could read it," I fired back. "Maybe even understand what it was all about."

"Don't worry. Silk," Gazarian told me. "Secretary Ghopal understands what it was

Purists may point out that this is not Science Fiction in the classical tradition—and they will be right. This is Space Opera—with a New Texan flavor, strongly barbecued. The world we will know tomorrow will undoubtedly face many of the problems faced, and faced so adequately, by Mr. Stephen Silk, diplomat extraordinary. The collaboration of H. Beam Piper, and John J. McGuire has resulted in a first-rate novel.

all about. All too well, You'll find."

A buzzer sounded gently on Ethel K'wang-Li's desk. She snatched up the hand-phone; a deathly silence filled the room while she listened and whispered into it and hung it up. They were all staring at me.

"Secretary Ghopal is ready to see Mr. Stephen Silk," she said. "In that way."

As I crossed the room, Staynes began drumming on the top of the desk with his fingers; the slow, reiterated rythm to which a man marches to a military execution.

"A cigarette?" Lawder inquired tonelessly. "A glass of rum?"

THERE were three men in the Secretary of State's private office. Ghopal Singh, the Secretary, dark-faced, gray-haired, slender and elegant, meeting me half-way to his desk. Another slender man, in black, with a silver-threaded black neckscarf: Rudolf Klung, the Secretary of the Department of Aggression. And a huge, gross-bodied man with a fat, baby-like face and opaque black eyes. When I saw him, I really began to be frightened. He was Natalenko, the Security Coordinator.

"Good morning, Mr. Silk," Secretary Ghopal greeted me, his hand extended. "Gentlemen, Mr. Stephen Silk, about whom we were speaking. This way, Mr. Silk, if you please."

There was a low coffee-table at the rear of the office, and four easy-chairs around it. On the round brass table-top were cups and saucers, a coffee-urn, cigarettes—and a copy of the current issue of the *Galactic Statesman's Journal*, open at an article entitled *Probable Future Courses of Solar League Diplomacy*, by somebody who had signed himself Machiavelli, Jr. I was beginning to wish that the pseudonymous Machiavelli, Jr. had stayed on Theta Virgo IV and been a wineberry planter, as his father had wanted him to. I avoided looking at the periodical. They were probably going to hang it around my neck before they shoved me out the airlock.

"Mr. Silk is, as you know, in our Consular Service," Ghopal was saying to the others. "Back to Terra on rotation; now with Mr. Halvord's section. He is the gentleman who did such a splendid job for us on Gamma Norma III. And, as he has demonstrated," he added, gesturing toward the *Statesman's Journal* on the Benares-work table, "he is a student both of the diplomacy of the past and the implications of our present policies."

"A bit frank," Klung commented, dubiously.

"But judicious," Natalenko squeaked, in the high eunuchoid voice that came so incon-

gruously from his bulk. He aired his singularly accurate predictions in a periodical that doesn't circulate more than a thousand copies outside his own department."

"Well, we've gone into that, gentlemen," Ghopal said. "If the article really makes trouble for us, we can always disavow it. Mr. Silk won't be around to draw fire on us."

Here it comes, I thought.

"That sounds pretty ominous, doesn't it, Mr. Silk," Natalenko tittered happily, like a ten-year-old who has just found a new beetle to pull the legs out of.

"It's not really as bad as it sounds, Mr. Silk," Ghopal hastened to re-assure me. "We are going to have to banish you, for a while, but I daresay that won't be so bad. We're sending you to Capella IV."

"Capella IV," I repeated, trying to remember something about it. Capella was G-type, like Sol; that wouldn't be so bad.

"New Texas," Klung helped me out.

Oh, God, no! I thought.

"You know, I assume, our chief interest in New Texas?" Natalenko asked.

"I had some of it for breakfast, sir," I replied. "Super-cow."

Natalenko tittered again. "Yes. New Texas is the butchershop of the Galaxy. In more ways than one, I'm afraid you'll find. They just

butchered one of our people there a short while ago. Our Ambassador, in fact."

That would be Silas Cumshaw. I asked when it had happened.

"A couple of months ago. We heard about it last evening, when the news came in on a freighter. Which serves to point up something you stressed in your article—the difficulties of trying to run a centralized democratic government on a Galactic scale. But we have another interest in that planet. You've heard, of course, of the z' Srauff."

That was a statement, not a question; Natalenko wasn't trying to insult me. Everybody'd heard of the z'Srauff. One of the extra solar intelligent humanoid races, evolved from canine or canine-like ancestors instead of primates. Most of them could speak Basic English; I never saw one who would admit to understanding more of our language than the 850-word Basic vocabulary. They occupied a half-dozen planets in a small star-cluster about forty light-years beyond the Capella System; they'd developed normal-space reaction-drive ships before we came into contact with them, and they had quickly picked up the hyperspace-drive from us. In the past century, it had become almost impossible to get into their star-group, although Srauff ships were orbiting in on every planet that

the League had settled or controlled. There were Srauff traders and small merchants all over the Galaxy, and their little meteor-mining boats were everywhere and all of them carried more of the most modern radar and astrogational equipment than a meteor-miner's lifetime earnings would pay for. I also knew that they were one of the chief causes of ulcers and premature gray hair at the League capital on Luna. I'd done a little reading in pre-Spaceflight Terran history; I had been impressed by the parallel between the present situation and one which had culminated, two and a half centuries before, on the morning of 7 December, 1941.

"What," Natalenko inquired, "do you think Machiavelli, Jr., would do about the z'Srauff?"

I thought for a moment.

"An unprovoked attack on the z'Srauff would set every other non-human race in the Galaxy against us...Would an attack by the z'Srauff on New Texas constitute just provocation?"

"It might. New Texas is an independent planet. We've been trying for half a century to persuade the New Texan government to join the League. We need their planet, for both strategic and commercial reasons. With the z'Srauff for neighbors, they need us as much at least as

we need them. The problem is to make them understand that."

I nodded again. "And an attack by the z'Srauff would do that, too, sir." I said.

Natalenko giggled again. "You see, gentlemen! Our Mr. Silk picks things up very handily, doesn't he?" He turned to Secretary of State Ghopal. "You take it from there," he invited.

Ghopal Singh smiled benignly. "Well, that's it, Stephen," he said. "We need a man on New Texas who can get things done. Three things, to be exact. First, find out why poor Mr. Cumshaw was murdered, and what can be done about it to maintain our prestige without alienating the New Texans. Second, bring the New Texans to a realization that they need the Solar League as much as we need them. And, third, forestall or expose the plans for the Srauff invasion of New Texas."

"And what," I asked, "will my official position be, on New Texas, sir? Or will I have one, of any sort?"

"Oh, yes indeed, Mr. Silk. Your official position will be that of Ambassador Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary. That, I believe, is the only vacancy which exists in the Diplomatic Service on that planet."

At Dumbarton Oaks Diplomatic Academy, they haze the freshmen by making them

sit on a one-legged stool and balance a teacup and saucer on one knee while the upper classmen pelt them with ping-pong balls. So I sipped my coffee, and set down the cup, and took a puff from my cigarette, and said:

"I am indeed deeply honored, Mr. Secretary; I trust I needn't go into any assurances that I will do everything possible to justify your trust in me."

"I believe he will, Mr. Secretary," Natalenko piped, in a manner that chilled my blood.

"Yes; I believe so," Ghopal Singh said. "Now, Mr. Ambassador; there's a liner on orbit two thousand miles off Luna, which has been held from blasting out for the last eight hours, waiting for you. Don't bother packing more than a few things; you can get everything you'll need aboard, or at New Austin, the planetary capital. Coordinator Natalenko had a man, a native New Texan named Hoddy Ringo, aboard the ship; he'll act as your personal secretary. You'll have to hurry, I'm afraid... Well, *bon voyage*, Mr. Ambassador."

I GATHERED a few things together, mostly small personal items, and all the microfilm spools I could find on New Texas, and got aboard a Space Navy cutter that was waiting to take me

to the ship. That was a four hours' trip, and I put in the time going over my hastily assembled microfilm library and using a stenophone to dictate a reading-list for the space-trip.

As I rolled up the stenophone-tape, I wondered what sort of a secretary they had given me, and, in passing, why Natalenko's department had to furnish him. I soon knew why! I found him standing with the ship's captain, inside the airlock, when I boarded the big spherical space-liner; a tubby little man with shoulders and arms he had never developed doing secretarial work, and a good-natured, not particularly intelligent face. *See the happy moron, he doesn't give a damn*, I thought. Then I took a second look at him. He might be happy, at the moment, but he wasn't a moron. He just looked like one. Natalenko's people often did; it was one of their professional assets. I noticed that he had a bulge under his left armpit the size of an 11-mm Army automatic.

I gathered, after talking with him for a while, that he had been away from his home planet for over five years, was glad to be going back, and especially glad that he was going back under the protection of Solar League diplomatic immunity. In fact, I got the impression that without that protection,

he wouldn't have been going back.

I made another discovery. My personal secretary, it seemed, couldn't read stenotype. I found that out when I gave him the tape I'd dictated aboard the cutter, to transcribe for me.

"Gosh, boss. I can't make anything out of this stuff," he confessed, looking at the combination shorthand-Braile that my voice had put onto the tape.

"Well, then, put it in a player and transcribe it by ear," I told him. He didn't seem to realize that that could be done. "How did you come to be sent as my secretary, if you can't do secretarial work?" I wanted to know.

He got out a bag of tobacco and a book of papers and began rolling a cigarette, with one hand.

"Why, shucks, boss; nobody seemed to think I'd have to do this kinda work," he said. "I was just sent along to show you the way around, when we get to New Texas, an' see you didn't get into no trouble." He got his hand-made cigarette drawing, and hitched the strap that went across his back and looped under his right arm. "A guy that don't know the way around can get into a lotta trouble on New Texas. If you call gettin' killed trouble."

So he was a bodyguard. I

wondered what else he was. One thing, it would take him forty two years to send a radio message back to Luna, and I could keep track on any other messages he sent, in letters or on tape, by ships. In the end, I transcribed my own tape, and then settled down to laying out my three weeks' study-course on my new post.

I found, however, that the whole thing could be learned in a few hours; the rest of what I had was duplication, some of it contradictory, It boiled down to this:

Capella IV had been settled during the first wave of extrasolar colonization, after the Fourth World—or First Interplanetary—War. The settlers had come from a place in North America, called Texas; one of the old United States. They had a lengthy history—independent republic, admission to the United States, secession from the United States, reconquest by the United States, and general intransigence under the United States, the United Nations and the Solar League. When the laws of non-Einsteinian physics were discovered and the hyperspace-drive developed, practically the entire population of Texas had taken to space to find a new home and independence from everybody.

They had found Capella IV, a Terra-type planet with a slightly higher mean tem-

perature, lower mass and gravitational field, about one quarter water and three-quarters land-surface, at a stage of evolutionary development approximating that of Terra during the late Pliocene. They also found Supercow, a big mammal looking like the unsuccessful attempt of a hippopotamus to impersonate a dachshund and about the size of a nuclear-steam locomotive. On New Texas plains there were almost billions of them; their meat was fit for the Gods of Olympus. So New Texas had become the meat-supplier to the Galaxy.

There was very little in any of the microfilm-books about the politics of New Texas; such as it was was very scornful. There were such expressions as 'anarchy tempered by assassination,' and 'grotesque parody of democracy.'

There would, I assumed, be more exact information in the material which had been shoved into my hand just before boarding the cutter from Luna, in a package labelled TOP SECRET; TO BE OPENED ONLY IN SPACE, AFTER THE FIRST HYPER-JUMP. There was also a big trunk that had been placed in my suite, sealed and bearing the same instructions.

The trunk was full of clothes. Short jackets and vests with big pockets, and

tight trousers with wide cuffs. Three pairs of boots, very fancy, with high heels. A couple of hats with four-inch brims. A lot of shirts that ran through the entire spectrum in the most violent shades. And there was a wide leather belt, practically a leather corset, to which were attached a pair of holsters, right and left hand. The holsters were the spring-ejection type which were secret equipment of the State Department Special Services; the pistols were 7-mm Krupp-Tatta Ultraspeed automatics.

There must be a mistake about that. I was an Ambassador, now, and an Ambassador never carried weapons. Diplomatic usages simply forbade it; it would be an outrageous insult to the Government to which he was accredited, like taking a poison-taster to a friendly dinner. Maybe I was supposed to turn the belt and holsters over to Hoddy Ringo.

So I broke open the sealed package. In it was a single loose-leaf notebook, marked TOP SECRET and bearing the customary bloodthirsty threats to the unauthorized and the indiscreet. It added positively nothing to what I already knew about conditions on New Texas, except for some brief comments on the four Solar League Ambassadors who had preceded me. The first of these. Andrew J. Hickock, had re-

signed after five years on New Texas, become a naturalized citizen of that planet, married the daughter of a local rancher and become active in local politics. That didn't sound like too bad an advertisement for the planet. The second had lasted seven years, and had then been brought home hopelessly insane. The third had shot himself after six months. And the fourth, Silas Cumshaw, had been murdered. There was no mention of the circumstances, except that the murder had occurred at the home of his original predecessor, Colonel Andrew J. Hickock.

There was a little more in the notebook. I was to wear the local costume on New Texas. That was something unusual; even in the Hooligan Diplomats, as the Consular Service was called, we had leaned over backward in wearing Terran costume to distinguish ourselves from the people among whom we worked. I was advised to start wearing the boots immediately, on shipboard, to accustom myself to the high heels. These, it appeared, were traditional. They had served a purpose in Terran Texas, when all travel had been on horseback; on horseless and mechanized New Texas they were a useless but venerated part of the cultural heritage. There were bits of advice about the hats,

and the trousers, which, for some obscure reason were known as levis. And I was informed, as a direct order, that I should wear the belt and pistols at all times outside the Embassy itself.

I slid off my shoes and pulled on a pair of boots. They fitted perfectly. Evidently I had been tapped for this job as soon as the word of Silas Cumshaw's death had reached Luna; there must have been some fantastic hurrying to get my outfit ready. I didn't like that any too well, and I liked the order to carry the pistols even less. Not that I had any objection to carrying weapons, *per se*; I had been born and raised on Theta Virgo IV, where children aren't allowed outside the house unattended until they've learned to shoot. But I did object to being sent, virtually ignorant of local customs, on a mission where I was ordered to commit deliberate provocation of the local government on the heels of my predecessor's violent death. The author of *Probable Future Courses of Solar League Diplomacy* had recommended the use of provocation to justify conquest. If the New Texans murdered two Solar League Ambassadors in a row, nobody would blame the League for moving in with a space-fleet and an army. I was beginning to understand how Dr. Guillotine must have felt while his neck

was being shoved into his own invention.

Of course, here were these notebooks, each marked in red: *Familiarize yourself with contents and burn or disintegrate*. I wrapped them up in the original package and went down to the lower passenger zone, where I found the ship's third officer, and he took me to the engine room; I shoved the package into one of the mass-energy converters and watched it resolve itself into its constituent protons, neutrons and electrons. On the way back, I stopped in the ship's bar.

Hoddy Ringo was there, with a young lady from the Aldebaran System, who was on her way home from one of the quickie divorce courts on Terra and was celebrating the base. I had been with him her martial emancipation. They were too engrossed in each other to notice me; when they left the bar, I slipped after them until I saw them enter the woman's state-room. That, of course, would have Hoddy immobilized and located for a while. I went back to our suite, picked the lock of Hoddy's room, and searched his luggage.

All his clothes were new, and there were not a great many of them. Evidently he was planning to re-outfit himself on New Texas. There were a few odds and ends which seemed to have come originally from that planet.

He had another 11-mm pistol, made by Consolidated-Martian Metalworks, mate to the one he was carrying in a shoulder-holster, and a wide two-holster belt like the one furnished me, but quite old. The holsters weren't Department Special Services type. That meant that Hoddy was just one of Natalenko's run-of-the-gallows cutthroats, not important enough to be issued the secret equipment. But, hidden in the lining of one of his bags, there was a sealed letter, addressed to Space-Commander Lucius C. Stonehenge, Aggression Department Attache at our New Austin Embassy. I had neither time nor equipment to attempt opening this; it sounds that would make you was probably nothing more than a letter-of-credence; the real message would be delivered orally.

The real message would probably concern arranging the murder of Ambassador Stephen Silk, and making it look like a New Texan job.

SO, starting that evening, or what passed for evening aboard a ship in hyperspace, Hoddy and I began a positively epochal binge together. As long as we were on the ship, I was perfectly safe. I'd have to be killed on New Texas to give Klung's boys an excuse for moving in. And there was a chance, that I might get Hoddy drunk to talk and still stay sober

enough to hear what he was saying.

Mostly, we drank something Hoddy called superbourbon—a New Texas drink. Bourbon County, Kentucky, would never have recognized it. They had no corn in New Texas; this was made out of what they called superyams. Practically everything on New Texas was supersomething I did acquire an ability to slug down 50 cc of it at a gulp without batting an eye, but as far as practical results were concerned, the binge was a total loss. Hoddy and I maintained a nice status of balance-of-insobriety and neither of us gave anything away to the other.

One thing; I left my belt and guns with the purser. I didn't want Hoddy poking around those secret holsters. I also had the captain radio New Austin as soon as we came out of our last hyperspacejump.

There was one thing that seemed to flicker about in my confused memories of those ten days. A girl; a big beautiful blonde. She seemed to have joined the party along with Hoddy's grass-widow from Aldebaran, and stayed with it to the end. Damn, I wished I could remember her name!

When we were fifteen thousand miles off-planet and the lighters from New Austin spaceport were re-

ported on the way, I got into the skin-tight levis, the cataclysmic-colored shirt, and the loose vest, tucked my big hat under my arm, and went to the purser's office for my guns, buckling them on. When I got back to the suite, Hoddy had put on his pistols and was practicing quick draws in front of the mirror. He took one look at my armament and groaned.

"You're gonna get yourself killed for sure, with that rig, an' them popguns," he told me.

"These popguns'll shoot harder and make bigger holes than that pair of museum-pieces you're carrying."

"An' them holsters!" Hoddy continued. "Why, it'd take all day to get your guns outa them! You better let me find you a real rig, when we get to New Austin..."

There was a chance, of course, that he knew what I was using and wanted to hide his knowledge. I doubted that.

Then he wandered off to say goodbye to the grass-widow from Aldebaran, leaving me to make the last-minute check on the luggage. I was hoping I'd be able to see that blonde .what was her name; Gail Something-or-Other. Let's see, she'd been at some Terran university, and she was on her way home to... To New Texas! Of course!

I saw her, half an hour later, in the crowd around the air-lock when the lighters came alongside, and tried to push my way toward her. As I did, the airlock opened, and the crowd surged toward it, and she was carried along.

Then the airlock closed, after she had passed through and before I could get to it. That meant I'd have to wait for the second lighter.

So I made the best of it, and spent the next half-hour watching the disc of the planet grow into a huge ball that filled the lower half of the viewscreen, and then lose its curvature, and instead of moving *in* toward the planet, we were going *down* toward it.

There was a crowd waiting for us when we got out and went down the escalators to the ground, and, as I had expected, a group of men headed by a tall, slender individual in the short black eisenhower and gray striped trousers and black homburg that was the uniform of the Diplomatic Service. Over their heads, at the other rocket-boat, I could see the gold-gleaming head of the girl I'd met on the ship.

I tried to push through the crowd and get to her; as I did, the embassy men got in my way.

"Mr. Silk! Mr. Ambassador! Here we are!" he was

clamoring. "The car for the Embassy is right over here!" He clutched my elbow. "You have no idea how glad we all are to see you, Mr. Ambassador!"

"Yes, yes; of course. Now, there's somebody over there I have to see, at once." I tried to pull myself loose from his grasp.

Across the concrete between the two lighters, I could see the girl push out of the crowd around her and wave a hand to me. I tried to yell to her; just then, another lighter, loaded with freight, started to lift out at a nearby stand, with the roar of half a dozen Niagaras. The thin man in the striped trousers was shouting into my ear, and pulling at me.

"We haven't time!" he finally managed to make himself heard. "We're dreadfully late, now sir! You must come with us!" He said something about the Embassy, and "full responsibility."

While he was speaking, the whole gang—Hoddy, the thin man with the black homburg, his younger accomplice in identical garb, and the chauffeur, all closed in on me and rushed me fifty yards across the concrete to where their aircar was parked. By this time the tall blonde had gotten clear of the mob around her and was waving frantically at me. I waved back, helpless, and then I was literally

hurled into the car and on to the seat. At once, the chauffeur jumped in and extended the car's wings, jetting up.

"Great God!" I bellowed. "This is the damnest piece of impudence I've had to suffer from my subordinates in my whole State Department experience! I want an explanation out of you, and it'd better be a good one..."

There was a moment's deafening silence. The thin man looked at me with the heartbroken eyes of a friendly dog that has just been kicked for something that wasn't really its fault.

"Mr. Ambassador, you can't imagine how sorry we all are, but if we hadn't gotten you away from the spaceport and to the Embassy at once, we would all have been much sorrier..."

"Somebody here gunnin' for the Ambassador?" Hoddy demanded sharply.

"Oh, dear! No; I hadn't thought of that," the thin man almost gibbered. "But your presence at the Embassy is of immediate and urgent necessity. You have no idea of the state into which things have gotten... Oh, pardon me, Mr. Ambassador. I am Gilbert W. Thrombley, your charge-d'affaires." I shook hands with him. "And Mr. Benito Gomez, the Secretary of the Embassy." I shook hands with him, too, and started to introduce Mr. Hoddy Ringo.

Hoddy, however, had turned to look out the rear window; immediately, he gave a yelp.

"We got a tail, boss! Two of them! Look back there!"

There were two black eight-passenger aircars, of the same model, whizzing after us, making an obvious effort to overtake us. The chauffeur cursed and fired his auxilliary jets, and then his rocket-booster. Immediately, black rocket-fuel puffs shot away from the pursuing aircars. Hoddy turned in his seat, cranked open a port-hole-slit in the window, and poked one of his 11-mm's out, letting the whole clip go. Thrombley and Gomez slid down onto the floor, and both began trying to drag me down with them, imploring me not to expose myself.

As far as I could see, there was nothing to expose myself to. The other cars kept coming, but neither of them were firing at us. There was no indication that Hoddy's salvo had had any effect on them. Our chaffeur went into a perfect frenzy of twisting and dodging, at the same time using his radiophone to tell somebody to get the goddam gate open in a hurry. I saw the blue skies and green plains of New Texas replacing one another above, under, and behind in front of us. Then the car set down on a broad stretch of concrete, and the wings were retracted

and we went whizzing down a city street.

We whizzed down a number of streets. We cut corners on two wheels, and on one wheel, and, I was prepared to swear, on no wheels. A couple of times, with the wings retracted, we actually jetted into the air and jumped over vehicles in front of us, landing again with bone-shaking jolts. Then we made an abrupt turn and shot in under a concrete arch, and a big door banged shut behind us, and we stopped in the middle of a wide patio, the front of the car a few inches short of a fountain. Four or five people, in diplomatic striped trousers, local dress and the uniform of the Space Marines, came running over.

Thrombley pulled himself erect and half-climbed, half-fell, out of the car. Gomez got out on the other side, with Hoddy; I climbed out after Thrombley.

A tall, sandy-haired man in the uniform of the Space Navy came over.

"What the devil's the matter, Thrombley?" he demanded. Then, seeing me, he gave me as much of a salute as a naval officer will ever bestow on anybody in civilian clothes.

"Mr. Silk?" He looked at my costume and the pistols on my belt in well-bred concealment of surprise. "I'm your Military Attache; Stone-

henge; Space-Commander, Space Navy."

I noticed that Hoddy's ears had pricked up, but he wasn't making any effort to attract Stonehenge's attention. I shook hands with him, introduced Hoddy, and offered my cigarette-case around.

"You seem to have had a hectic trip from the spaceport, Mr. Ambassador. What happened?"

Thrombley began accusing our driver of trying to murder the lot of us. Hoddy brushed him aside and explained.

"Just after we'd took off, two other cars took off after us. We speeded up, an' they speeded up, too. Time we got into the city, we'd dropped them. Nice job of driving. Probably saved our lives."

"Shucks, that wasn't nothin'," the driver disclaimed. "When you drive for politicians, you're either good or you're good an' dead."

"I'm surprised they started so soon," Stonehenge said. Then he looked around at my fellow-passengers, who seemed to have realized, by now, that they were no longer dangling by their fingernails over the brink of the grave. "But, gentlemen, let's don't keep the Ambassador standing out here in the sun."

So we went over under the arches at the side of the patio, and were about to sit down when one of the Em-

bassy servants came up, followed by a man in a loose vest and blue levis and a big hat. He had a pair of automatics on his belt, too.

"I'm Captain Nelson; New Texas Rangers," he introduced himself. "Which one of you-all is Mr. Stephen Silk?"

I admitted it. The Ranger pushed back his wide hat and grinned at me.

"You know, Mr. Silk, we got a report, from a mighty good source, that you'd been kidnapped at the spaceport by a gang of thugs..."

"A blonde source?" I made curving motions with my hands. "I don't blame her. My efficient and conscientious charge-d'affaires, Mr. Thrombley, felt that I should reach the Embassy, here, as soon as possible, and from where she was standing, it must have looked like a kidnapping. Fact is, it looked like one from where I was standing, too. Was that you and your people who were chasing us? Then I must apologize for opening fire on you...I hope nobody was hurt."

"No; our cars are pretty well armored. You scored a couple of times on one of them, but no harm done. I reckon after what happened to Silas Cumshaw, you had a right to be suspicious."

I noticed that refreshments, including several bottles, had been placed on a big

wicker table under the arched veranda.

"Can I offer you a drink, Captain, in token of mutual amity?" I asked.

"Well, now, I'd like to, Mr. Ambassador, but I'm on duty..." he began.

"You can't be. You're an officer of the Planetary Government of New Texas, and in this Embassy, you're in the territory of the Solar League."

"That's right, now, Mr. Ambassador," he grinned. "Extraterritoriality. Wonderful thing, extraterritoriality." He looked at Hoddy, who, for the first time since I had met him, was trying to shrink into the background. "And diplomatic immunity, too. Ain't it, Hoddy?"

After he had had his drink and departed, we all sat down. Thrombley began speaking almost at once.

"Mr. Ambassador, you must, you simply must, issue a public statement immediately, sir. Only a public statement will relieve the crisis..."

"Oh, come, Mr. Thrombley," I objected. "Captain Nelson'll take care of all that in his report to his superiors..."

Thrombley looked at me for a moment as though I had been speaking to him in Hot-tentot, then waved his hands in polite exasperation.

"Oh, no, no! I didn't mean that, sir. I mean a statement

to the effect that you have assumed full responsibility for the Embassy. Where is that thing? Mr. Gomez!"

Gomez gave him four or five sheets, stapled together. He laid them on the table, turned to the last sheet, and whipped out a pen.

"Here, sir; just sign here."

"Are you crazy?" I demanded. "I'll be damned if I sign that. Not till I've taken an inventory of the physical property of the Embassy, and familiarized myself with all its commitments, and had the books audited."

Thrombley and Gomez looked at one another. They both groaned.

"But we must have a statement of assumption of responsibility..." Gomez dithered.

"...or the business of the Embassy will be at a dead stop, and we can't do anything," Thrombley finished.

"Wait a moment, Thrombley," Stonehenge cut in. "I understand Mr. Silk's attitude. I've taken command of a good many ships and installations, at one time or another, and I've never signed anything I couldn't see and count." He turned to me. "Without any disrespect to the charge-d'affaires, Mr. Silk, this Embassy has been pretty badly disorganized since Mr. Cumshaw's death. No one felt authorized, or, to put it more accurately, no one dared, to declare himself

acting head of the Embassy..."

"Because that would make him the next target?" I interrupted. "Well, that's what I was sent here for. Mr. Gomez, as Secretary of the Embassy, will you please at once, prepare a statement to the effect that I am now the authorized head of this Embassy. Get that out at once. Tomorrow, I will present my credentials to the Secretary of State here; thereafter, Mr. Thrombley, you can rest in the assurance that I'll be the one they'll be shooting at."

"But you can't wait that long, Mr. Ambassador," Thrombley almost wailed. "We must go immediately to the Statehouse. The reception for you is already going on..."

I looked at my watch, which had been regulated aboard ship for Capella IV time. It was just 1315.

"What time do they hold diplomatic receptions on this planet, Mr. Thrombley?" I asked.

"Oh, any time at all, sir. This one started about 0900, when the news that the ship was in orbit off-planet got in. It'll be a barbecue, of course, and..."

"But we must hurry, Mr. Ambassador. If you will change, now, to formal dress..." He looked at me and gasped. I think it was the first time he had actually seen what I was wearing. "In

native dress, Mr. Ambassador!" he rebuked. Then his eyes fell to my belt. "Oh, dear! And *armed!*" He shuddered. "Mr. Ambassador; I understand that you were recently appointed from the Consular Service. I sincerely hope you will not take it amiss if I point out, here in private, that..."

"Mr. Thrombley, I am wearing this costume on the suggestion, and these pistols on the direct order, of Secretary of State Ghopal Singh."

That set him back on his heels. "I...I can't believe it!" he exclaimed. "An Ambassador is *never* armed."

"Not when he's dealing with a Government which respects the comity of nations, no," I replied. "The fate of Mr. Cumshaw indicates that the Government of New Texas is not such a Government. These pistols are intended to indicate the manner in which this—this Government, here, is being regarded by the Government of the Solar League." I turned to Stonehenge. "Commander, what sort of an Embassy Guard have we?" I asked.

"Space Marines, sergeant and five men. I double as guard officer, sir."

"Very well, Mr. Thrombley insists that it is necessary for me to go to this fish-fry or whatever it is immediately. I want two men, driver and auto-rifleman, for my car. And from now on, I

would suggest, Commander, that you wear your sidearm at all times outside the Embassy."

"Yes, sir!" This time, Stonehenge gave me a real salute.

"Well, I must phone the Statehouse, then," Thrombley said. "We will have to call on Secretary of State Palme, and then on President Hutchinson..." With that, he got up, excused himself, motioned Gomez to follow, and hurried away.

I got up, too, and motioned Stonehenge aside.

"Aboard ship, coming in, I was told that there's a task-force of the Space Navy on maneuvers about five light-years from here," I said.

"Yes, sir. Fifth Space Fleet. Fleet Admiral Sir Rodney Tregaskis."

"Can we get hold of a fast hyper-drive space-boat, in a hurry?"

"Eight or ten of them are always available around New Austin spaceport."

"All right; charter one and get out to that fleet. Tell Admiral Tregaskis that the Ambassador at New Austin feels in need of protection; possibility of z'Srauff invasion. I'll give you written orders. I want the fleet within radio call.

"The Embassy radio isn't reliable beyond about sixty light minutes, sir."

"Then tell Sir Rodney to bring his fleet in that close.

I hope you don't think I'm having nightmares, Commander; the danger of a z'Srauff invasion was pointed out to me by...by persons on the very highest level, on Luna."

He nodded. "I'm always having the same kind of nightmares, sir." He hesitated for a moment. "We don't want the New Texans to know, of course, that you've sent for the fleet?"

"Naturally not."

"Well, if you can wait till about midnight before I leave, I can get a boat owned, manned and operated by Solar League people. The boat's a dreadful-looking old tub, but she's sound and fast; the gang who own her are pretty notorious characters—suspected of smuggling, piracy, and what not—but they'll keep their mouths shut if well paid."

"Then pay them well," I said. "And it's just as well you're not leaving at once. When I get back from this clambake, I'll want to have a general informal council, and I certainly want you in on it."

On the way to the Statehouse in the car, I kept wondering just how smart I had been. I was pretty sure that the z'Srauff were getting ready for a sneak attack on New Texas, and, of course, as Solar League Ambassador, I had the right to call on the space navy for armed protection. Sending Stonehenge off

would delay anything he and Hoddy might be cooking up, too. On the other hand, with the fleet at hand, they might decide to have me rubbed out in a hurry, to justify seizing the planet ahead of the z'Srauff.

The Statehouse covered about a square mile of ground; it was an insane jumble of buildings piled together as though it had been in continuous construction ever since the planet was colonized, eighty-odd years before. At one of the main entrances, the car stopped, our Marine driver and auto-rifleman piled out, and the former opened the rear door for us while the latter stood with his back to it and his piece at the ready. I told them to take in the barbecue, but leave word with the doorman where they could be found; Hoddy, Thrombley and I went in, and were met by a couple of New Texas Rangers, one of them the officer who had called at the Embassy. They guided us to the office of the Secretary of State.

"We're dreadfully late," Thrombley was fretting. "I do hope we haven't kept the Secretary waiting too long..."

From the looks of him, I was afraid we had. He jumped up from his desk and hurried across the room his hand extended.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Thrombley," he burred ner-

vously. "And this is the new Ambassador, I suppose. And this..." He caught sight of Hoddy Ringo, bringing up in the rear and stopped short. "Oh, dear me!"

So far, I had been building myself a New Texas stereotype from Hoddy Ringo and the Ranger officer who had chased us to the Embassy. This frightened little rabbit of a fellow simply didn't fit it.

Thrombley introduced me. I introduced Hoddy as my confidential secretary and advisor. We all shook hands, and Thrombley dug my credentials out of his briefcase and handed them to me, and I handed them to the Secretary of State, who barely glanced at them, then shook my hand again fervently and mumbled something about "inexpressible pleasure" and "entirely acceptable to my Government." That made me the accredited Ambassador to New Texas. Mr. Palme hoped, or said he hoped, that my stay on New Texas would be long and pleasant; he seemed less than convinced that it would be. His eyes kept returning in horrified fascination to my belt; each time they would focus on the butts of my Krupp-Tattas he would pull them resolutely away again.

"And now, we must take you to President Hutchinson; he is most anxious to

meet you, Mr. Silk. If you will please come with me..."

Four or five Rangers who had been loitering in the hall outside moved to precede us as we went toward the elevator.

Although we had come into the building at street-level we went down three floors from the hallway outside the Secretary of State's office, into a wide room, the floor of which was oil-stained, as though vehicles were continually being driven in and out. Daylight was visible through open doors at the far end. As we approached them, the Rangers fanning out on either side and in front of us, I could hear a perfect Bedlam of noise outside—shouting, singing, dance-band music, interspersed with the banging of shots.

We emerged into one end of a big rectangular plaza, at least five hundred yards in length. Most of the uproar was centered at the far end, where several thousand people, in costumes colored through the whole spectrum, were milling about. There seemed to be at least two square-dances going on, to the music of competing bands, and at the distant end of the plaza, over the heads of the crowd, I could see the piles of tracks of an overhead crane, under which something like two open-hearth furnaces

were in operation. Between us and the bulk of the crowd, in a cleared space, two medium tanks, heavily padded with mats, were ramming and trying to overturn one another, a mob of spectators crowding as close to them as they dared.

"Oh, dear; I always dread these things!" Palme was saying.

"Yes, absolutely *anything* could happen..." Thrombley twittered.

"Man, this is a real barbecue!" Hoddy gloated. "Now I really am at home!"

"Over this way, Mr. Silk," Palme said, guiding me toward the short end of the plaza, on our left. "We will see the President, and then..." He gulped. "Then we will all go to the reception."

In the center of the short end of the plaza, dwarfed by the monster bulks of steel and concrete and glass around it, stood a little old building of warm-tinted adobe. It seemed familiar to me; I had never seen it before, but I had seen it pictured somewhere. Pictured under attack, with gun-smoke spouting from windows and parapets... I plucked Thrombley's sleeve.

"Isn't that a replica of the Alamo?" I whispered.

He was shocked. "Oh, dear, Mr. Ambassador; don't let anybody hear you ask that. That's no replica. It is the Alamo. *The Alamo.*"

"Yes; the Presidential offices, and also our national shrine," Palme whispered, in the hushed tones of a man talking in church. Even Hoddy was staring at it in awe, and I could have sworn that there were tears in his eyes.

Ten or twelve Rangers loitered at the front of the Alamo, and with them I saw the dark blue tunics and red-striped blue trousers of my two Marines. There was a little three-wheeled motor-cart among them, from which they were helping themselves to food and drink. The two Marines shoved their sandwiches into the hands of a couple of Rangers and tried to come to attention.

"At ease, at ease," I told them. "Hoddy, you better get in on some of this grub; I may be inside for quite a while."

As soon as the Rangers saw Hoddy, they hastily got things out of their hands. Hoddy grinned at them.

"Take it easy, boys," he said. "I'm pertected by the game of laws. I'm a diplomat, I am."

The President of New Texas, John Hutchinson, was alone in his office; he advanced to greet us, a slender, stoop-shouldered man in a black gold-laced jacket. He had a narrow, compressed mouth and eyes that seemed to be watching every corner of the room at once. He wore

a pair of small pistols in cross-body holsters under his coat, and he always kept one hand or the other close to his abdomen. Both he and Palme had the look of hunted animals, but where Palme was a rabbit, twitching to take flight at the first whiff of danger, Hutchinson was a cat who hears hounds baying; ready to run if he could or claw if he must.

"Good day, Mr. Silk," he said, shaking hands with me after the introductions. "I see you're heeled; you're smart. You wouldn't be here today if poor Silas Cumshaw'd been as smart as you are. Great man, though; wise and far-seeing statesman. He and I were real friends."

"You know who Mr. Silk brought with him as body-guard?" Palme asked. "Hoddy Ringo!"

"Oh, my God! I thought this planet was shut of him!" The President turned to me. "You got a good trigger-man, Mr. Ambassador. Lot of folks here won't thank you for bringing him back to New Texas, though." He looked at his watch. "We have time for a little drink, before we go outside, Mr. Silk," he said. "Care to join me?"

I assented; he got a bottle of superbourbon out of his desk, and four glasses. Palme got some water-tumblers and brought a pitcher of ice-water from the cooler. I noticed

that he filled his three-ounce liquor-glass to the top and gulped it down at once. He might act as though he were descended from a long line of maiden aunts, but he took his liquor in blasts that would have floored a spaceport labor-boss.

We had another drink, a little slower, and chatted for a while, and then Hutchinson said, regretfully, that we'd have to go outside and meet the folks. Outside, our guards—Hoddy, the two Marines, the Rangers who had escorted us from Palme's office, and Hutchinson's retinue—surrounding us, and we made our way down the plaza, through the crowd. The uproar was as bad as New Year's Eve in Manhattan or Nairobi or New Moscow on Terra.

"Don't take all this as a personal tribute, Mr. Silk!" Hutchinson screamed into my ear. "On this planet, anything's a good excuse for a barbecue."

As we got up onto the platform, close enough to the barbecue pits to feel the heat from them, somebody let off what sounded like a 50-mm anti-tank gun five or six times.

Hutchinson grabbed a microphone and bellowed into it: "Ladies and gentlemen! Your attention, please!"

The noise began to diminish, slowly, until I could hear

one voice, in the crowd below:

"Shut up, you damn fools! We can't eat till this is over!"

Hutchinson introduced me, in very few words. I gathered that lengthy speeches at barbecues were not popular on New Texas.

"Ladies and gentleman!" I yelled into the microphone. "Appreciative as I am of this honor, there is one here who is more deserving of your notice than I; one too whom I, also, pay homage. He's over there on the fire, and I want a slice of him as soon as possible!"

That got a big ovation. There was, beside the water pitcher, a bottle of superbourbon. I ostentatiously threw the water out of the glass, poured a big shot of the corrosive stuff, and downed it.

"For God's sake, let's eat!" I finished. Then I turned to Thrombley, who was looking like a priest who has just seen the bishop spit in the holy-water font. "Stick close to me," I whispered. "Cue me in on the local notables, and the Diplomatic Corps." Then we all got down off the platform and a band climbed up and began playing one of those raucous "cowboy ballads" which had originated in Manhattan about the middle of the Twentieth Century.

"The sandwiches'll be here in a moment, Mr. Ambassa-

dor," Hutchinson screamed—in effect, whispered—in my ear. "Don't worry about shaking hands with a sandwich in your other hand; that's standard practice, here... You struck just the right note, up there; that business with the liquor was positively inspired!"

The sandwiches—huge masses of meat and hot relish, wrapped in tortillas of some sort—arrived, and I bit into one. I got outside of the first sandwich in a surprisingly short time, and was starting on the second when the crowd began coming.

First, the Diplomatic Corps, the usual collection of weirdies, human and otherwise. The Ambassador from Tara, in a suit of what his planet produced as a substitute for Irish homespuns; his Embassy, if it was like the others I had seen elsewhere, would be an outside cottage with whitewashed walls and a thatched roof, with a bowl of milk outside the door for the Little People. The Ambassador from Alpheratz II, the South African Nationalist planet, with a full beard and an old-fashioned plug hat and tail-coat. They were a frustrated lot. They'd gone into space to practice *apartheid*, and settled on a planet where there was no other intelligent race to be superior to. Another racist behind him brown shirt, polished boots,

and red armband with a funny black crumpled cross on a white circle, the Ambassador from Aryana, giving me a stiff-arm salute and heiling some long-dead paranoid of the Twentieth Century. The Ambassador from Spica VII, a short, jolly-looking little fellow, with a head like a seal's, long arms, short legs and a tail like a kangaroo's. The Ambassador from Beta Cephus VI, who could have passed for human if he hadn't had blood with a copper instead of an iron base; his skin was a dark green and his hair was bright blue.

I was beginning to correct my first impression that Thrombley was a complete dithering fool. He stood at my left elbow, whispering the names, Governments and home planets of the Ambassadors as they came up, and handing me little slips of paper on which he had written phonetically correct renditions of the greetings I would give them in their own language. I was still twittering a reply to the greeting of Nanadabadian, from Beta Cephus VI, when he whispered to me:

"Here it comes, sir. The z'Srauff!"

The z'Srauff were reasonably close to human stature and appearance, allowing for the fact that their ancestry had been canine instead of simian. They had, of course, longer and narrower jaws

than we have, and definitely carnivorous teeth. There were stories floating around that they enjoyed barbecued Terran even better than they did supercow.

This one advanced, extending his three-fingered hand.

"I am most happy to make connection with Solar League representative," he said. "I am named Gglafr Ddesptann Vuvuvu."

No wonder Thrombley had left him introduce himself. I answered in the Basic English that was all he'd admit to understanding:

"The name of your great nation has gone before you to me. I have hope to make great pleasure in you and me to be friends."

"We will be in same place again times with no number," the alien replied. "I have hope for you that time you are in this place will be long and will put pleasure in your heart."

Then the pressure of the line behind him pushed him on. Cabinet Members; Senators and Representatives; Prominent Citizens, mostly Judge So-and-So, or Colonel This-or-That. It was an instant before I recognized the gleaming golden hair and the statuesque figure.

"Thank you; I have met the Ambassador." The lovely voice was shaking with restrained anger.

"Gail!" I exclaimed.

"Your father coming to the

barbecue, Gail?" President Hutchinson was asking.

"He ought to be here any minute. He sent me on ahead from the hotel. He wants to meet the Ambassador; that's why I joined the line."

"Well, suppose I leave Mr. Silk in your hands for a while," Hutchinson said. "I ought to circulate around a little."

"Yes. Just leave him in my hands!" she said vindictively.

"What's wrong, Gail?" I wanted to know. "I know, I was supposed to meet you at the spaceport!"

"You made a fool of me at the spaceport!"

"Look, I can explain everything. My Embassy staff insisted on hurrying me off..."

Somebody gave a high-pitched whoop directly behind me and emptied a pistol; I couldn't hear what she said, either, but it was something angry.

"You have to listen to me!" I roared in her ear. "I can explain everything?"

"Any diplomat can explain anything!"

"Look, Gail; you're hanging an innocent man! I'm entitled to a fair trial!"

Somebody on the platform fired his pistol within inches of the loud-speakers; it sounded like an H-bomb going off. She grabbed my wrist and dragged me toward a door under the platform.

"Down here!" she yelled.

"And this better be good, Mr. Silk!"

We went down a spiral ramp, lighted by widely-scattered overhead lights.

"Space-attack shelter," she explained. "And look; what goes on space-ships is one thing, but it's as much as a girl's reputation's worth to go down here at a barbecue."

There seemed to be quite a few girls at that barbecue who didn't care what happened to their reputations. We discovered that after looking into a couple of passageways that branched off from the entrance.

"Over this way," she said. "Confederate Courts Building; there won't be anything going on over here, now."

I told her, with as much humorous detail as possible, about how Thrombley had shanghaied me to the Embassy, and about the chase by the Rangers. Before I was half through, she was laughing heartily, all traces of her anger gone. Finally, we came to a stairway, and at the head of it to a small door.

"I think there's a reading-room of the Law Library up here," she said. Let's go in and enjoy the quiet for a while."

But when we opened the door, there was a Ranger standing inside.

"Come to see a trial, Mr. Silk? Oh, hello, Gail. Just in time; they're going to prepare for the next trial."

As he spoke, something clicked at the door. Gail looked at me in consternation.

"Now we're locked in," she said. "We can't get out till the trial's over."

I LOOKED around; we were on a high balcony, at the end of a long, narrow room. In front of us, windows rose to the ceiling, and it was evident that the floor of the room was about twenty feet below ground level. Outside, I could see the barbecue still going on, but not a murmur of the noise penetrated to us. The bench was against the outside wall, under the tall windows; to the right of it was a railed stand with a chair in it, and in front, arranged in U-shape, were three tables at which a number of men were hastily conferring. There were nine judges in a row on the bench, all in black gowns. The spectators' seats below were filled with people, and there were quite a few up here on the balcony.

"What is this? Supreme Court?" I asked as Gail piloted me to a couple of seats where we could be alone.

"No, Court of Political Justice," she told me. "This is the court that's going to try those three Bonney brothers, who killed Mr. Cumshaw."

It suddenly occurred to me that that was the first time I had heard anything specific

about the death of my predecessor.

"That isn't the trial that's going on now, I hope?"

"Oh, no; that won't be for a couple of days. Not till after you can arrange to attend. I don't know what this trial is. I only got home today, myself."

"Well, what's the procedure, here?" I wanted to know.

"Well, those nine judges," she began. "The one in the middle is President Judge Nelson. You've met his son—the Ranger officer who chased you from the spaceport. He's a regular jurist. The other eight are prominent citizens who are drawn from a panel, like a jury. The men at the table on the left are the prosecution. Friends of the politician who was killed. And the ones on the right are the defense; they'll try to prove that the dead man got what was coming to him. And the ones in the middle are friends of the court; they're just anybody who has any interest in the case—people who want to get some point of law cleared up, or see some precedent established, or something like that."

"You seem to assume that this is a homicide case," I mentioned.

"They generally are. Some-time mayhem, or wounding, or simple assault, but..."

There had been some sort

of conference going on in the open space of floor between the judges' bench and the three tables. It broke up, now, and the judge in the middle rapped with his gavel.

"Are you gentlemen ready?" he asked. "All right, then. Court of Political Justice of the Confederate Continents of New Texas is now in session. Case of the friends of S. Austin Maverick, deceased, late of James Bowie Continent, versus Wilbur Whately."

"My God, did somebody finally kill Aus Maverick?" Gail whispered.

On the center table, in front of the friends of the court, both sides seemed to have piled their exhibits; among the litter I saw some torn clothing, a big white sombrero covered with blood, and a long machete.

"The general nature of the case," the judge was saying, "is that the defendant, Wilbur Whately, of Sam Houston Continent, is here charged with divers offenses arising from the death of the Honorable S. Austin Maverick, whom he killed on the front steps of the Legislative Assembly Building, here in New Austin..."

What goes on here? I thought angrily; this was the rankest instance of a prejudged case I'd ever seen. I started to say as much to Gail, but she hushed me.

"I want to hear the specifications," she said.

A man at the prosecution table had risen. "Please the Court," he began, "the defendant, Wilbur Whately, is here charged with political irresponsibility, and excessive atrocity in exercising his constitutional right of criticism of a practicing politician. The specifications are, as follows: That, on the afternoon of May Seventh, Anno Domini 2193, Anno Atomicus 250, the defendant here present did arm himself with a machete, of the value of five pesos, said machete not being one of his normal and accustomed weapons, and did loiter in wait on the front steps of the Legislative Assembly Building in the city of New Austin, Continent of Sam Houston, and did approach the decedent, addressing him in scurrilous, abusive, obscene, and indecent language, and did set upon and attack him with the machete aforesaid, causing the said decedent, S. Austin Maverick, to die."

The Court wanted to know how the defendant would plead; somebody, without bothering to rise, said, "Not guilty 'honor."

There was a brief scraping of chairs; four or five men from the defense and the prosecution tables got up and advanced to confer in front of the bench, comparing sheets

of paper. The man who had read the charges, obviously the chief prosecutor, made himself the spokesman.

"Your Honor, Defense and Prosecution wish to enter the following stipulations: That the decedent was a practicing politician within the meaning of the Constitution, that he met his death in the manner stated in the coroner's report, and that he was killed by the defendant, Wilbur Whately."

"Is that agreeable to you, Mr. Vincent?" the judge wanted to know.

The defense answered affirmatively. I sat back, gapping like a fool. Why, that was practically—no, it was a confession.

"All right, gentlemen," the judge said. "Now we have all that out of the way, let's get on with the case."

"Well, your Honor, we have a number of character witnesses," the prosecution—prosecution, for God's sake!—announced.

"Skip them," the defense said. "We stipulate."

"But you can't stipulate character testimony," the prosecution argued. "You don't know what our witnesses are going to testify to."

"Sure we do; they're going to give us a big long shaggy-dog story about the Life and Miracles of Saint Austin Maverick. We'll agree in advance to all that; this case is only concerned with his

record as a politician, and as he spent the last fifteen years in the Senate, that's all a matter of public record. I assume that the prosecution is going to introduce all that, too?"

"Well, naturally..." the prosecutor began.

"Including his public acts on the last day of his life?" the counsel for the defense demanded. "His actions on the morning of May Seventh as chairman of the Finance and Revenue Committee? You going to introduce that as evidence for the prosecution?"

"Well, now..." the prosecutor began.

"Your Honor, we ask to have a certified copy of the proceedings of the State Finance and Revenue Committee for the morning of May Seventh, 2193, read into the record of this court," the counsel for the defense said. "And thereafter, we rest our case."

"Has the prosecution anything to say before we close the court?" Judge Nelson inquired.

"Well, your Honor, this seems... That is, we ought to hear both sides of it. My old friend Aus Maverick was really a fine man; he did a lot of good for the people of his Continent..."

"Yeah, we'd of lynched him, when he got back, if somebody hadn't chopped him up here in New Austin!" a voice

from the rear of the courtroom broke in.

The prosecution hemmed and hawed for a moment, and then announced, in a hasty mumble, that it rested.

"I will now close the court," Judge Nelson said. "I advise everybody to keep your seats; I don't think it's going to be closed very long."

And then, he actually closed the court; pressing a button on the bench, he raised a high black screen in front of him and his colleagues. It stayed up for some sixty seconds, and then dropped again.

"The Court of Political Justice has reached a verdict," he announced. "Wilbur Whately, and your attorney, approach and hear the verdict."

The defense lawyer mentioned a young man who had been sitting beside him to rise. In the silence that had fallen, I could hear the defendant's boots squeaking as he went forward to hear his fate. The judge picked up a belt and a pair of pistols that had been lying in front of him.

"Wilbur Whately," he began, "this court is proud to announce that you have been unanimously acquitted of the charge of unjustified and excessive atrocity, and political irresponsibility.

"You all know," he continued, addressing the entire assemblage, "the reason for

which this young hero cut down that monster of political iniquity, Austin Maverick. On the very morning of his justly-merited death, Austin Maverick, using the powers of his political influence, rammed through the Finance and Revenue Committee a bill entitled 'An Act for the Taxing of Personal Incomes, and for the Levying of a Withholding Tax.' Fellow citizens, words fail me to express my horror of this diabolic proposition, this proposed instrument of tyrannical extortion, borrowed from the Dark Ages of the Twentieth Century. Why, if this young nobleman had not taken his blade in hand, I'd have killed the good for nothing myself!"

He leaned forward, extending the belt and holsters to the defendant.

"I therefore restore to you your weapons, taken from you when, in compliance with the law, you were formally arrested: Wilbur Whately, take them and go, a free man. Court adjourned; next session 0900 tomorrow. For Chrissake let's get out before the barbecue's over!"

Some of the spectators, drooling for barbecued supercow, began crowding and jostling toward the exits; more of them were pushing to the front of the courtroom, cheering and waving their hip-flasks. The prosecution and about half of the friends of

the court hastily left by a side door, probably to issue statements disassociating themselves from the deceased Maverick.

"So that's the court that's going to try the men who killed Ambassador Cumshaw," I commented, as Gail and I went out. "Why, the purpose of that court seems to be to acquit murderers."

"Murderers?" She was indignant. "That wasn't murder. He just killed a politician. All that court could do was determine whether or not the politician needed it, and while I never heard about Maverick's income-tax proposition, I can't see how they could have brought in any other kind of a verdict. Of all the outrageous things...!"

I was thoughtfully silent as we went out into the plaza, which was still a riot of noise and polychromatic costumes. Apparently, on New Texas, killing a politician wasn't regarded as *mallum in se*, and was only *mallum prohibitorum* to the extent that what happened to the politician was in excess of what he deserved. I began to understand why Palme was such a scared rabbit; why Hutchinson had that hunted look and kept his hands always within inches of his pistols. I began to feel more pity than contempt for Thrombley, too. He's been on this planet too long, and he never should have been sent

here in the first place. If they were going to try the killers of Cumshaw in that court, that meant that on New Texas, foreign diplomats were regarded as practicing politicians...

That made me a practicing politician!

That's why, when we got back to the vicinity of the bandstand, I had my right hand close to my pistol, and had my thumb on the inconspicuous little spot of silver inlay that operated the secret holster mechanism.

I saw Hutchinson and Palme and Thrombley ahead; with them was a newcomer, a portly, ruddy-faced gentleman with a white mustache and imperial, in a white suit. Gail broke away from me and ran toward him. This, I thought, would be her father; now I would be introduced and find out just what her last name was. I followed more slowly, and saw a waiter, with a wheeled serving-table, move in behind the group which she had joined.

So I saw what none of them did—the waiter suddenly reverse his long carving-knife and poise himself for a blow at President Hutchinson's back. I simply pressed the little silver stud on my belt; the Krupp-Tatta popped obediently out of the holster into my open hand. I thumbed off the safety and swung up; when my sights closed

on the rising hand that held the knife, I fired.

Hoddy Ringo, who had been holding a sandwich with one hand and a drink with the other, dropped both and jumped on the man whose hand I had smashed; a couple of Rangers closed in and grabbed him, also. The group around President Hutchinson had all turned and were staring from me to the man I had shot, and from him to the knife with the broken handle, lying on the ground.

Hutchinson spoke first. "Well, Mr. Ambassador! My Government thanks your Government! That was nice shooting!"

"Hey, you been holdin' out on me!" Hoddy accused. "I never knowed you was that kinda gunfighter!"

"There's a new wrinkle," the man with the white goat-ee said. "We'll have to screen the help at these affairs a little more closely." He turned to me. "Mr. Ambassador, New Texas owes you a great deal for saving the President's life. If you'll get that pistol out of your hand, I'd be proud to shake it, sir."

I holstered my automatic, and took his hand. Gail was saying, "Stephen, this is my father," and at the same time, Palme, the Secretary of State, was doing it more formally:

"Ambassador Silk, may I present one of our leading citizens and large ranchers,

Colonel Andrew Jackson Hickock."

It was early evening before we finally managed to get away from the barbecue. Thrombley had called the Embassy and told them not to wait dinner on us, and the staff were finished eating and relaxing in the patio when our car came in through the street gate. Stonehenge and another man came over to meet us as we got out—a man I hadn't met before, a little fellow, half-Latin, half Oriental; he was in New Texas costume and wore a pair of pistols like mine, in State Department Special Services holsters. He didn't look like a Dumbarton Oaks product; I thought he was more likely an alumnus of some private detective agency.

"Mr. Francisco Parros, our Intelligence man," Stonehenge introduced him.

"Sorry I wasn't here when you arrived, Mr. Silk," he said. "Out checking on some things. But I saw that bit of shooting, on the telecast screen in a bar over town. You know, there was a camera right over the bandstand; caught the whole thing. They ran it on the half-hourly newscasts; everybody in New Austin, maybe on New Texas, is talking about it, now."

"Yes, indeed, sir," Gomez, the Embassy Secretary, said, joining us. "You've made yourself more popular in the

eight hours since you landed than poor Mr. Cumshaw had been able to do in the ten years he spent here. I'm afraid, sir, you've given me a good deal of work, though, answering your fan-mail."

We went over and sat down at one of the big tables under the arches at the side of the patio.

"Well, that's all to the good," I said. "I'm going to need a lot of local good will, in the next few weeks...No thanks, Mr. Parros," I added, as the Intelligence man picked up a bottle and made to pour for me. "I've been practically swimming in super-bourbon all afternoon. A little black coffee, if you don't mind. And now, gentlemen, if you'll all be seated, we'll see what all has to be done."

"Naturally, I spent some time on the ship reading up on this planet, but I know practically nothing about what's been going on here in, say, the last year, and all I know about the death of Mr. Cumshaw is that he is said to have been killed by three brothers named Bonney. I actually don't even know whether he was shot, stabbed, hanged or poisoned."

"So you'll want just about everything, Mr. Silk," Thrombley said. "Really, I don't know where to begin..."

"Start with why and how Mr. Cumshaw was killed. The rest will key into that."

So they began; Thrombley, Stonehenge and Parros doing the talking. It came to this:

Ever since we had first established an Embassy on New Texas, the goal of our diplomacy on this planet had been to bring it into the Solar League.

"You must know, by now, what politics on this planet are like, Mr. Silk," Thrombley said.

"I have an idea. One Ambassador gone native, another gone crazy, the third killed himself, the fourth murdered."

"Yes, indeed. I've been here fifteen years, myself..."

"That's entirely too long for anybody to be stationed in this place," I told him. "If I'm not murdered, myself, in the next couple of weeks, I'm going to see that you and any other member of this staff who's been here over ten years are rotated home for a tour of duty at Department Headquarters."

"Oh, would you, Mr. Silk? I would be so happy..."

Thrombley wasn't much in the way of an ally, but at least he had a sound, selfish, motive for helping me stay alive. I assured him that I would get him sent back to Luna, and then went on with the discussion.

Up until six months ago, Silas Cumshaw had modeled himself after the typical New Texas politician. Nothing he ever said could possibly be

construed as controversial. Naturally, the cause of New Texan annexation to the Solar League had made no progress whatever. Then, one evening, at a banquet, he had executed a complete 180-degree turn, gotten up, and made a speech in which he had proclaimed that union with the Solar League was the only possible way in which New Texas could retain even a vestige of local sovereignty. He had talked about an invasion as though the enemy's ships were already coming out of hyperspace, and had named the invader, calling the z'Srauff "our common enemy." The Srauff Ambassador, also present, had immediately gotten up and stalked out, amid a derisive chorus of barking and baying from the New Texans. The New Texans were first shocked and then wildly delighted; the Solar League Ambassador had become a hero overnight.

"Sounds as though there is a really strong sentiment at what used to be called the grass-roots level in favor of annexation," I commented.

"There is," Parros told me. "Of course, there is a very strong isolationist, anti-annexation, sentiment, too. The sentiment in favor of annexation is based on the point Mr. Cumshaw made—the danger of conquest by the z'Srauff. Against that, of course, there is fear of higher

taxes, fear of loss of local sovereignty, fear of abrogations, and chauvinistic pride."

"You think, then," I said, "that Mr. Cumshaw was assassinated by opponents of annexation."

"Of course, sir," Thrombley replied. "These Bonneys were only hirelings. Here's what happened, on the day of the murder:

"It was the day after a holiday, a big one here on New Texas, celebrating some military victory by the Texans on Terra, a battle called San Jacinto. We didn't have any business to handle, because all the local officials were at home nursing hangovers, so when Colonel Hickock called..."

"Who?" I asked sharply.

"Colonel Hickock. The father of the young lady you were so attentive to at the barbecue. He and Mr. Cumshaw had become great friends, beginning shortly before the speech the Ambassador made at that banquet. He called about 0900, inviting Mr. Cumshaw out to his ranch for the day, and as there was nothing in the way of official business, Mr. Cumshaw said he'd be out by 1030. And when he got there, there was an aircar circling about, near the ranchhouse. As Mr. Cumshaw got out of his car and started up the front steps, this car landed on the driveway and began shooting

with a 20-mm auto-rifle. Mr. Cumshaw was hit several times, and killed instantly."

"The fellows who did the shooting were damned lucky," Stonehenge took over. "Hickock's a big rancher. I don't know how much you know about supercow-ranching, sir, but those things have to be hired with tanks and light aircraft, so that every rancher has at his disposal a fairly good small air-armor combat team. All the big ranchers are colonels in the Armed Reserve. Hickock has about fifteen fast fighters, and thirty medium tanks armed with 50-mm guns. He also has some A A - guns around his ranch-house—— every once in a while, these ranchers get to squabbling among themselves.

"Well, these three Bonney brothers just manage to get their car into the air when a burst from the ranch-house caught their jet assembly and they could only get as far as Bonneyville, thirty mile away, before they had to land. They landed right in front of the town jail. This Bonneyville's an awful shantytown; everybody in it is related to everybody else; the mayor, Kettle-Belly Sam Bonney, is an uncle of theirs. These three boys—Switchblade Joe Bonney, Jack-High Abe Bonney and Turkey-Buzzard Tom Bonney—— immediately claimed sanctuary in the jail on the

grounds that they had been near to—get that; I think that indicates the line they're going to take at the trial—near to a political assassination. They were immediately given the protection of the jail, which is about the only well-constructed building in the place, practically a regular fort."

"You think that was planned in advance?" I asked.

Parros nodded emphatically. "I do. There was a hell of a big gang of these Bonneys at the jail; almost the entire able-bodied population of the place. As soon as Switchblade and Jack-High and Turkey-Buzzard landed, they were rushed inside and all the doors barred. About three minutes later, the Hickock outfit started coming in, first aircraft and then armor. They gave that town a regular Georgie Patton style blitzing."

"Yes. I'm only sorry I wasn't there to see it," Stonehenge put in. "They knocked down or burned most of the shanties, and then they went to work on the jail, and the aircraft began dumping these fire-bombs and stun-bombs that they use to stop supercow stampedes or scare them out of thick brush. As soon as Kettle-Belly saw what he had on his hands, he radioed a call for Ranger protection. Our friend Captain Nelson went out to see what the trouble was."

"Yes. I got the story of that from Nelson," Parros put in. "Much as he hated to do it, he had to protect the Bonneys. But he was smart. He grabbed everything relating to the killing—the aircar and the 20-mm auto-rifle in particular—and he's keeping them under cover. On physical evidence alone, he has the killing pinned on the Bonneys so well that they'll never get away with this story of being merely innocent witnesses."

"The rest, Mr. Silk, is up to us," Thrombley said. "I have Captain Nelson's assurance that he will give us every assistance, but we simply must see to it that those creatures with the out-landish names are convicted."

I didn't have a chance to say anything to that; at that moment one of the servants ushered the Ranger captain, Nelson, toward us.

"Good evening, Captain," I greeted him. "Join us, seeing that you're on foreign soil and not on duty."

He sat down with us and poured a drink.

"I thought you might be interested," he said. "We gave that waiter a going over. We wanted to know who put him up to it, and we finally got the truth out of him. He was paid a thousand pesos for the job, by a character they call Snake-Eyes Sam Bonney. A cousin of the three who killed Mr. Cumshaw."

"Nephew of Kettle-Belly Sam," Parros interjected. "You pick him up?"

Nelson shook his head disgustedly. "He's out in the high grass somewhere. We're still looking for him... Oh, yes; and I just heard that the trial of Switchblade and Jack-High and Turkey-Buzzard is scheduled for three days from now. You'll be notified in due form tomorrow; I thought you might want to know in advance."

"I certainly do, and thank you, Captain... We were just talking about you when you arrived," I mentioned, "about the arrest, or rescue, or whatever you call it, of that trio."

"Yeah. Pity Hickock's boys didn't get hold of them before I got there; would have saved everybody a lot of trouble."

"Just what impression did you get, at the time, Captain?" I asked. "You think Kettle-Belly knew in advance about the murder?"

"Sure he did. They had the whole jail fortified. There were no prisoners inside. I found out that they had all been released that morning. When I got there, what had been the cell-block was on fire, and they were trying to defend the mayor's office and the warden's office. These Bonneys gave me the line that they'd just been witnesses to the killing of Mr. Cumshaw by Hickock and that the Hickock outfit was trying to

rub them out to keep them from testifying. I just laughed and started to walk out. Finally, they confessed that they'd shot Mr. Cumshaw, but they claimed that it was right of action against political malfeasance. When they did that, I had to take them in to New Austin. Of course, Hickock didn't give me any trouble about that."

"They confessed to you, before you arrested them?"

"That's right. I'm going to testify to that, Monday, when the trial's held. And that ain't all; we got their fingerprints off the car, and off the gun, and we have the gun identified to the shells that killed Mr. Cumshaw. We got them nailed."

I asked him if he'd give Mr. Parros a complete statement of what he'd seen and heard at Bonneyville, and suggested that they go into Parro's office, where they'd be undisturbed. The Ranger and my Intelligence man got up and took a bottle of superbourbon with them. As they were leaving, Nelson turned to Hoddy.

"You'll have to look out for your laurels, Hoddy," Nelson said. "Your Ambassador seems to be making himself quite a reputation as a gunfighter."

"Look," Hoddy said, and though he was facing Nelson I felt that he was really talking to Stonehenge. "Before I'd go up against this guy, I'd shoot myself. That way, I

could make sure I'd get a nice painless job."

After they were gone, I turned to Stonehenge and Thrombley.

"This seems to have been a carefully pre-arranged killing. They knew, in advance, that Mr. Cumshaw would be on Colonel Hickock's front steps at about 1030. How did they find that out?"

"Why... Why, I'm sure I don't know," Thrombley said. It was obvious that the idea had never occurred to him before. "Colonel Hickock called at 0900. Mr. Cumshaw left the Embassy in an aircar a few minutes later. It took an hour and a half to fly o. t. to the Hickock ranch..."

"I don't like the implications, Mr. Silk," Stonehenge said. "In the first place, Colonel Hickock simply isn't that sort of a man; he doesn't use his hospitality to trap people to their death. In the second place, he doesn't need to use people like these Bonneys. His own men would do anything for him. In the third place, he is one of the leaders of the annexation movement here; this was obviously an anti-annexation job. And in the fourth place, he and Mr. Cumshaw were really friends."

"On the other hand, Mr. Ambassador," Thrombley said, "you will recall, I think, that Colonel Hickock did do everything in his power to see that these Bonney brothers

did not reach court alive. And, as you pointed out..."

"Then we have a traitor inside the Embassy."

"Oh, but that's unthinkable!" Thrombley gasped. "Why, I never heard, in all the history of the Department..."

I turned to Gomez. "Get us the official telescreen-log," I told him. "And the tapped-lines log, too."

"That won't be necessary," Thrombley told me. "None of the junior clerks were on duty, and I took the only three calls that came in, myself. First, there was the call from Colonel Hickock. Then, the call about the wrist-watch. And then, a couple of hours later, the call from the Hickock ranch, about Mr. Cumshaw's death."

"What was the call about the wrist-watch?" I asked.

"Oh, that came from the Srauff Embassy," Thrombley said. "For some time, Mr. Cumshaw had been trying to obtain one of the very precise watches which the z'Srauff manufacture on their home planet. The Srauff Ambassador called, that day, to tell him that they had one for him, and wanted to know when it was to be delivered. I told them that the Ambassador was out, and they wanted to know where they could call him, and I..." Thrombley's mouth opened in horror. "Oh, my God! I...I told them..."

"You couldn't know," I comforted him. "After all, a call from one Ambassador to another... What about this watch, though? There's more to this than a simple favor from one Ambassador to another."

"Mr. Cumshaw had been trying to get one of those things at my insistence," Stonehenge said. "Naval Intelligence is very much interested in them, and we want a sample. The Srauff watches are very peculiar; they are operated by radium decay which, of course, is a universal constant. They are uniform to the tenth-second, and they are all synchronized with the official time at the capital city of the principal Srauff planet. The time used by the Srauff Navy," Stonehenge added. "They are supposed to be used in religious observances... timing hours of prayer, I believe. They can, of course, have other uses. For example, I can imagine all those watches giving the wearer a light electric shock, or ringing a little bell, all over New Texas, at exactly the same moment. And then I can imagine all the z'Srauff getting into space-attack shelters." He looked at his own watch. "And that reminds me; my gang of pirates are at the spaceport by now. I wonder if somebody could drive me there."

"I'll drive him, boss," Hody volunteered.

I was wondering how I could break that up, plausibly and without betraying my suspicions, when Parros and Ranger Captain Nelson joined us.

"I have a lot of stuff here," Parros said. "Stuff we never seemed to have noticed. For instance..."

I interrupted. "Commander Stonehenge's going to the spaceport, now," I said. "Suppose you ride with him, and brief him on the way. Then, when he's aboard, come back and tell us."

Hoddy looked at me for a long thirty seconds. His expression started by being exasperated and ended by betraying grudging admiration.

I put Thrombley in charge of the routine work of the Embassy, with instructions to answer all inquiries about me with the statement, that I was too immersed in work of clearing up matters left unfinished after the death of the former Ambassador for any social activities. Then I called the Hickock ranch, in the west end of Sam Houston Continent, mentioning an invitation the Colonel and his daughter had extended me, and told them I would be out to see them before noon Saturday. With Hoddy Ringo driving the car, I arrived at about 1000, and was welcomed by Gail and her father, who had flown out the evening before, after the barbecue.

Hoddy, accompanied by a Ranger and one of Hickock's ranch-hands, all three disguised in shabby and grease-stained cast-offs borrowed at the ranch, and driving a dilapidated air-car from the ranch junkyard, visited the slum-village of Bonneyville, and spent all day there, posing as a trio of range-tramps out of favor with the law. I spent the day with Gail, flying over the range, visiting Hickock's herd-camps and slaughtering-crews. It was a pleasant day, and I managed to make it instructive also.

Because of their huge size, ...they ran to a live weight of around fifteen tons...and their uncertain disposition, supercows were not really domesticated. Each rancher owned the herds on his own land, chiefly by virtue of constant watchfulness over them. There were always a couple of helicopters hovering over each herd, with fast fighter-planes waiting on call to come in and drop fire-bombs or stun-bombs in front of them if they showed a disposition to wander too far. Naturally, things of this size could not be shipped live to market; they were butchered on the range, and the meat hauled out in big 'copter-trucks. Slaughtering was done with medium tanks mounting 50-mm guns, usually working at the rear of the herd, although a supercow herd could change directions almost in a second and the

killing-tanks would then find themselves in front of a stampede. I saw several such incidents; once Gail and I had to dive in with our car and help turn the herd.

We got back to the ranch-house shortly before dinner. Gail went at once to change clothes; Colonel Hickock and I sat down together for a drink in his library and study, the walls panelled in plastic-hard supercow-leather.

"What do you think of our planet, now, Mr. Silk?" Colonel Hickock asked.

"Well, Colonel, I replied, "I must say that politics is nothing, here, if not exciting and exacting."

"You don't understand it, though." That was about half question and half statement. "Particularly our custom of using politicians as clay pigeons, eh?"

"Well, it is rather unusual..."

"Yes. And it's fundamental to our system of government... Here, you were out, all afternoon, with Gail; you saw how we have to handle the supercow herds. Well, it is upon the fact that every rancher commends a powerful force of aircraft and armor, easily convertible to military uses, that our political freedom rests. You see, our Government is, in effect, an oligarchy of the big land-owners and ranchers, who, in combination, have enough military power to overturn any Planetary Government

overnight. And, on the local level, it is a paternalistic feudalism. That's something that would have stood the hair of any Twentieth Century leftist 'Liberal' on end. And it gives us the freest government anywhere in the Galaxy.

"There were a number of occasions—much less frequent now than formally—when coalitions of big ranches combined their strength and marched on the Planetary Capital to protect their rights from Government encroachment. This sort of thing could only be a resorted to in defense of some inherent right, and never to infringe the rights of others, because, in the latter case, other armed coalitions would have arisen, as they did once or twice during the first thirty years of New Texan history, to resist. So the right of armed intervention by the people when the Government invaded or threatened their rights became an acknowledged part of our political system. And you can't admit that a man with five hundred employees and a force of tanks and aircraft has the right to resist the government and at the same time deny that right to a man with only his own pistol or machete."

"I notice the President and the other officials have themselves surrounded by guards to protect them from individual attack," I said. "Why doesn't the Govern-

ment, as such, protect itself with an army and air-force large enough to resist any possible coalition of the big ranchers?"

"Ha, because we don't let the Government!" Hickock said. "We have no standing army; only the New Texas Rangers. And the Legislature won't authorize any standing army, or appropriate funds to support one. Any member of Legislature who tried it would get what Austin Maverick got, a couple of weeks ago, or what Sam Saltkin got, eight years ago, when he proposed a law for compulsory registration and licensing of firearms. The opposition to that tax scheme of Maverick's wasn't because of what it would cost the public in taxes, but from fear of what the Government would do with the money after they got it. Keep a Government poor and weak and it's your servant; let it get rich and powerful, and it's your master. We don't want any masters here on New Texas."

"How about your rancher oligarchy?" I asked.

He laughed. "Son, if I started acting like a master around this ranch in the morning, they'd find my body in an irrigation ditch before sunset. When you have five hundred men, all friends and all armed, you just act real considerate toward them if you want to keep on living."

"Then would you say that

the opposition to annexation comes from the people who are afraid that if New Texas enters the Solar League there will be League troops sent here, and this....this interesting system of insuring Government responsibility to the public...would be brought to an end?"

"Yes. If you can show the people of this planet that the League won't interfere with local political practices, you'll have a 99.95-percent majority in favor of annexation. We're too close to the Srauff Star-Cluster, out here, not to see the benefits of joining the Solar League."

Hoddy and I got back to the Embassy about 1700 Sunday; Commander Stonehenge had returned two hours earlier, and reported that the fleet had moved in to a position on sixty light-minutes off Capella IV. I managed, by one device or another, to keep Hoddy and Stonehenge from getting together alone; in fact, I was almost certain that Hoddy hadn't even delivered his letter to Stonehenge yet.

After dinner, we gathered in my office for our coffee and a final conference before the opening of the trial, the next morning. Stonehenge spoke first.

"No matter what happens, we have the fleet within call," he said. "Sir Rodney's been active in picking up these Srauff meteor-mining

boats; we have a good screen around the entire system. I don't think anybody knows that we're ready for any kind of action the circumstances may call for."

Possible circumstances including the assassination of Ambassador Silk, I thought.

"Well, boss, I gave you my end of it, coming in," Hoddy said. "Want me to go over it again? All right. In Bonneyville, we found half a dozen people who can swear that Kettle-Belly Sam Bonney was making preparations to protect those three brothers an hour before Ambassador Cumshaw was shot. The whole town's sore as hell at Kettle-Belly for antagonizing the Hickock outfit and getting the place shot up the way it was. And we have witnesses that Kettle-Belly was in some kind of a deal with the z'Srauff, too. The Rangers gathered up eight of them, who can swear to the preparations and to the fact that Kettle-Belly had Srauff visitors on different occasions before the shooting."

"That's what we want," Stonehenge said. "Something that'll connect this murder with the z'Srauff."

"Well, wait till you hear what I got," Parros told him. "In the first place, we traced the gun and the aircar. The Bonney brothers bought both of them from Srauff merchants, for ridiculously nominal prices. In their whole

lives, those three boys never had enough money among them to pay the list price of the gun, let alone the car. That is, not till a week before the murder."

"They got prosperous, all of a sudden?" I asked.

"Yes. Two weeks before the shooting, Kettle-Belly Sam's bank account got a sudden transfusion; some anonymous benefactor deposited 250,000 pesos—about a hundred thousand dollars—to his credit. He drew out 75,000 of it, and some of the money turned up again in the hands of Switchblade and Jack-High and Turkey-Buzzard. Then, again, a week before you landed here, he got another hundred thousand from the same anonymous source, and drew out twenty thousand. We think that was the money that went to pay for that attempted knife job on Hutchinson. Two days before the barbecue, the waiter deposited a thousand at the New Austin Packers' & Shippers' Trust."

"Can you get that introduced as evidence at the trial?" I asked.

"Sure. Kettle-Belly banks at the town called Crooked Creek, about forty miles from Bonneyville. We have witnesses from the bank... I got the dope on the line the Bonney brothers are going to take, on trial. They have a lawyer, Clement A. Sidney, one of what passes for the Socialist Party on this plan-

et. He'll just deny everything. The Bonneys are just three poor but honest boys who are being framed by the corrupt tools of the Big Ranching Interests."

Hoddy made an impolite noise. "Whatta we got to worry about, then?" he demanded. "They're a cinch for conviction!"

"I agree with that," Stonehenge said. "If they tried to base their defense on political conviction and opposition to the Solar League, they might have a chance. This way, they haven't."

"All right, gentlemen," I said. "I take it that we're agreed that we must all follow a single line of policy, and not work at cross-purposes to one another?"

They all agreed to that instantly.

"Well, then; I trust that you all realize that we cannot, under any circumstances, allow those three brothers to be convicted in that court," I added.

There was an instant's silence, while Hoddy and Stonehenge and Parros and Thrombley were realizing what they had just heard. Then Stonehenge cleared his throat and said:

"Mr. Ambassador! I'm sure you have some excellent reason for that remarkable statement, but I must say..."

"It was a really colossal error on somebody's part," I said, "that this case was al-

lowed to get into this Court of Political Justice. It never should have. And if we take part in the prosecution, or allow those men to be convicted, we will establish a precedent to support the principle that a foreign Ambassador is, on this planet, definable as a practicing local politician. I will invite you to digest that for a moment."

A moment was all they needed. Thrombey was horrified, and dithered incoherently for a moment. Stonehenge frowned and fidgeted with some papers in front of him. Even Hoddy got at least part of it.

"Why, that means that anybody can bump off any diplomat he doesn't like..." he began.

"That is only part of it, Mr. Ringo," Thrombley told him. "It also means that a diplomat, instead of being regarded as the representative of his own Government, becomes, in effect, a functionary of the Government of New Texas, to which he is accredited. Why, all sorts of complications could arise..."

"It certainly would impair the principle of extraterritorially of Embassies," Stonehenge picked it up. "And it would practically destroy the principle of diplomatic immunity."

"Migawd!" Hoddy looked around nervously, as though he could already hear an

army of New Texas Rangers, each with a warrant for Hoddy Ringo, battering at the gates.

"We'll have to do something!" Gomez, the Secretary of the Embassy, said.

"I don't know what," Stonehenge said. "The obvious solution, of course, would be to bring charges against those Bonneys of simple first-degree murder, which would be tried in an ordinary criminal court, but it's too late for that now. We wouldn't have time to prevent their being arraigned in this Political Justice court, and once a defendant is brought into court, on this planet, he cannot be brought into court again for the same act. Not the same *crime*, the same *act*."

"That is a safeguard against double jeopardy!" I commented. I thought for a while. "Look; we must have those Bonney brothers brought to trial. It's the only way we have of publicizing the fact that Ambassador Cumshaw was murdered at the instigation of the z'Strauff. We dare not allow them to be convicted in the Court of Political Justice, for the reasons already stated. And, to maintain the prestige of the Solar League, we dare not allow them to go unpunished."

"We can have it one way," Parros said, "and maybe we can even have it two ways. But I'm dammed if I can see

how we can have it all three ways!"

I could see a way. I didn't want to have to see it that way, but it was the only way I could see.

"Well, here's what we'll have to do, gentlemen," I began. "We let the trial go on. We use it too the limit to brand the z'Strauff as the real murderers. And then..."

A couple of New Texas Ranger tanks met the Embassy car four blocks from the Statehouse and convoyed us into the central plaza, where the barbecue had been held on Friday afternoon, when I had arrived on New Texas.

There was as dense a crowd as the last time I had seen the place; they were quieter, to the extent that there were no bands, and no shooting or cowbells or whistles. The barbecue-pits were going, again, and hawkers were pushing or propelling their little wagons about, vending sandwiches. I saw half a dozen big twenty-foot television screens apparently wired from the courtroom. As soon as the Embassy car and its escorting tanks entered the piazza, a ovation broke out. I was cheered, with the high-pitched *yip-eee!* of New Texas, and told not to let them so-and-sos get away with it.

There were more Rangers on guard at the doors of the courtroom. Remembering some tradition about one riot,

one Ranger, their numbers gave a good indication of the seriousness of this particular trial. The only spectators being admitted to the courtroom seemed to be prominent citizens with enough pull to secure passes. Some of the spectators' benches had been removed to clear the front of the room; there was a bulky shape under a cloth cover which must be the aircar, and a smaller cloth-covered shape that looked like a 50-mm dual-purpose gun. The smaller exhibits, including a 20-mm machine-rifle, were plied on the friends-of-the-court table. The prosecution table was already occupied ... Colonel Hickock, who waved in greeting to me, three or four other men who looked like well-to-do ranchers, and a delegation of lawyers.

"Samuel Goodham," Parros, beside me whispered, indicating a big, heavy-set man with white hair, dressed in a dark suit of the cut that had been fashionable on Terra seventy five years ago. "Best criminal lawyer on the planet. Hickock must have hired him."

There was quite a swarm at the center table, too. Some were ranchers, a couple were in aggressively shabby work-clothes, and there were several members of the Diplomatic Corps. Herr Reinhardt Judenheter, the Aryn Ambassador; Padraic O'Niall, from Tara; and Nan-

adabadian of Beta Cephus VI, with his belt full of knives. I shook hands with them, and gathered that they, too, were worried about the precedent that might be established by this trial. While I was introducing Hoddy Ringo as my Attache Extraordinary, which was no less than the truth, the defense party came in.

There were only three lawyers...a little, rodent-like fellow whom Parros pointed out as Sidney, and two assistants. And, guarded by a Ranger and a couple of court-bailiffs, the three defendants, Switchblade Joe, Jack-High Abe and Turkey-Buzzard Tom Bonney. There was probably a year or so age difference from one to another; they all had pale eyes and narrow, loose-lipped faces. Subnormal, probably psychopathic, I thought. Jack-High Abe had his left arm in a sling and his left shoulder in a plaster cast. The buzz of conversation among the spectators altered its tone subtly and took on a note of hostility as they entered and seated themselves.

The balcony seemed to be crowded with press-representatives; several telecast cameras and sound-pickups had been rigged to cover the front of the room from various angles, a feature which had been missing from the trial I had seen with Gail on Friday.

Then the judges entered

from a door behind the bench, which must have opened from a passageway under the plaza, and the court was called to order.

The President Judge was the same Nelson who had presided at the Whately trial; the first thing on the agenda seemed to be the selection of a new board of associate judges. Parros, beside me, explained in a whisper that the board which had served on the previous trial would sit until that could be done.

A slip of paper was drawn from a box; when the name was called, a man sitting on one of the front rows of spectators' seats got up and came forward. One of Sidney's assistants rummaged through a card-file in front of him and handed a card to his chief. At once, Sidney was on his feet.

"Challenged, for cause!" he called out. "This man is one of the biggest landowners on this planet; he owns a huge ranch here on Sam Houston Continent, and others on James Bowie, Sam Rayburn and William Barret Travis Continents. He is a member of the very class of exploiters and corruptionists against whom these three boys have struggled all their lives, and a notorious pro-annexationist, a tool of the imperialistic Solar League. Furthermore, he is known to have declared, in conversation at the bar of the Silver Peso Saloon, here in

New Austin, that these three boys, my clients, ought all to be hanged higher'n Haman man."

"Yes, I said that!" the venireman declared. "I'll repeat it right here; all three of these murdering skunks ought to be hanged higher than Ha-But, your Honors, it is the right of every New Texan to receive fair trial before he is hanged, and if I had the honor of sitting on this court, I'd give them the fairest trial they ever had."

"Your Honors!" Sidney almost screamed. "If, after hearing this man's brazen declaration of bigoted class-hatred against my clients, he is allowed to sit on that bench..."

Judge Nelson pounded with his gavel. "You don't have to instruct me in my judicial duties, Counselor," he said. "The venireman has obviously disqualified himself by giving evidence of prejudice... Next name!"

The next man was challenged; he was a retired packinghouse operator in New Austin, who had once expressed the opinion that Bonneyville and everybody in it ought to be A-bombed off the face of New Texas. Sidney seemed to have gotten the names of everybody likely to be called for court-duty, and had something on each one of them. It went on like that all morning. Sidney seemed to have an allowance of peremptory challenges, but he never

expended one if he could possibly make a challenge-for-cause stick. And, of course, each challenge was an excuse for a harangue about the exploited proletariat, the grasping and corrupt landowners, and the imperialistic warmongers of the Solar League.

We took an hour, at noon, for lunch, and then it began again. By 1645, fifteen minutes before court should be adjourned, Judge Nelson ordered the bailiff to turn the clock back to 1300. By this time, Clement A. Sidney was probably the most unpopular man on New Texas. Finally, Nanadabadian, the Ambassador with the bright blue hair from Beta Cephus VI, rose to his feet.

"Please your profoundly erudite Honor," he addressed the court, in his high, twittering voice. "This despicable person, Ambassador of the humble world you call Beta Cephus VI, speaking as friend of the court, beseeches friendly counsel and advice."

"Well, Mr. Ambassador?" Nelson asked, swallowing a smile. "What's your problem?"

Nanadabadian looked at Sidney, his eyes ranging from the lawyer's abdomen to his throat and back again, while he fondled the biggest knife in his belt.

"Would your Honor please to advise my unworthy self, who am law-venerating person, unwilling to perform any prohibited act, of little legal

technicality, to wit: Is attorney-at-law, in private practice, defined by your great planet's legal code as a practicing politician?"

He had the knife about one-quarter drawn. Sidney got one hand under his coat and started backing around the table.

"Your Honors! This is monstrous! I, a citizen of New Texas, and an officer of the court, am being threatened here in the very temple of our laws by this... this alien!"

"I heard no threats uttered; nothing but a simple question on a point of law... No, Nanadabadian, I regret to advise you that an attorney-at-law is not a practicing politician within the meaning of the Act to Insure Political Responsibility. I can't tell you how sorry I am..."

Goodham, the chief prosecution lawyer, got up. "Your Honor, may I suggest that Ambassador Nanadabadian might be reminded that as an accredited diplomatic representative, he enjoys complete immunity from arrest or prosecution..."

"There's a big crowd outside," one of the bailiffs interjected. "They've got tired waiting on the trial to start, so somebody got a big long rope, and they're picking sides for a tug-of-war or something."

Colonel Andrew J. Hickock rose.

"Your honor; the present court is not obliged to retire from the bench until another

court had been chosen; they are now sitting as a court in being. I propose that the trial begin, with the present court on the bench."

Sidney began yelling protests. The Aryan Ambassador pulled his old-fashioned black necktie around under his left ear and held the ends above his head. Nanadabadian drew his biggest knife and began trying the edge on a sheet of paper. And Hoddy Ringo, in a loud voice, said: "I'm a diplomat, too! Ain't I got immunity?"

"Well, your Honor, I certainly do not wish to act in an obstructionist manner. The defense agrees to accept the present court."

"Prosecution agrees to accept the present court," Goodham parroted.

"The present court will continue on the bench, to try the case of the Friends of Silas Cumshaw, deceased, versus Switchblade Joe Bonney, Jack-High Abe Bonney, Turkey-Buzzard Tom Bonney, et als." He rapped with his gavel. "Court is herewith adjourned until 0900 tomorrow."

The trial got started, the next morning, in prompt and businesslike manner, with a minimum of oratory and objections from Sidney. The charges and specifications were duly read, the three defendants pleaded not guilty, and then Goodham advanced with a paper in his hand to address the court. Sidney scampered up to take his po-

sition beside him. Goodham began to offer what seemed to be the customary stipulations.

In all my planning, I'd forgotten that. I couldn't let those stipulations stand without protest, and at the same time, if I protested the characterization of Cumshaw as a practicing politician, the trial could easily end right there. So I prayed for a miracle, and Clement A. Sidney promptly obliged me.

"Defense won't stipulate anything!" he barked. "My clients, here, are victims of a monstrous conspiracy to conceal the true facts of the death of Silas Cumshaw. They ought never to have been arrested or brought here, and if the Prosecution wants to establish anything, they can do it by testimony, in the regular and lawful way. This practice of free-wheeling stipulation is only one of the many devices by which the courts of this planet are being perverted to serve the corrupt and unjust ends of a gang of reactionary landowners..."

Judge Nelson's gavel hit the bench with a crack like a rifle-shot.

"Mr. Sidney! In justice to your clients, I would hate to force them to change lawyers in the middle of their trial, but if I hear another remark like that about the courts of New Texas, that's exactly what will happen, because you'll be in jail for contempt. Is that clear, Mr. Sidney?"

They began calling up witnesses. First the doctor who had certified Ambassador Cumshaw's death; he gave a concise description of the wounds which had killed my predecessor. Sidney tried to make something out of the fact that he was Hickock's family physician, and consumed more time. Then I got up.

"Your Honor, I am present here as *amicus curiae*, because of the obvious interest which the Government of the Solar League has in this case..."

"Objection!" Sidney yelled.

"Please state it," Nelson invited.

"This is a court of the people of the planet of New Texas; this foreign emissary of the Solar League, sent here to conspire with New Texan traitors to the end that New Texas shall be reduced to a supine and ravished satrapy of the all-devouring empire of the Galaxy..."

Judge Nelson rapped sharply.

"Friends of the court are defined as persons having a proper interest in the case. As this case arises from the death of the former Ambassador, of the Solar League, I cannot see how the present Ambassador and his staff can be excluded. Overruled." He nodded to me. "Continue, Mr. Ambassador."

"As I understand, I have the same rights of cross-examination of witnesses as counsel for the prosecution

and defense; is that correct, your Honor?" It was, so I turned to the witness. "I suppose, Doctor, that you have had quite a bit of experience, in your practice, with gunshot wounds?"

He chuckled. "Mr. Ambassador, it is gunshot-wound cases which keeps the practice of medicine and surgery alive on this planet. Yes, I definitely have."

I picked up the 20-mm machine-rifle...it weighed a good sixty pounds...from the table, and asked him if this weapon could have inflicted the wounds which had killed Silas Cumshaw. He agreed that it both could and had.

"This the usual type of weapon used in your New Texas politician liquidations?" I asked. "Certainly not. The usual weapons are pistols; sometimes a hunting-rifle or a shotgun."

I got the same question in when I cross-examined the ballistics witnesses.

"No, not at all. That's a very expensive weapon, Mr. Ambassador. Wasn't even manufactured on this planet; made in the Srauff Star-Cluster. A weapon like that sells for five, six hundred pesos."

"It seems," I remarked, "that the defense is overlooking an obvious point there. I doubt if these three defendants ever, in all their lives, had among them the price of such a weapon."

That, of course, brought Sidney to his feet, spitting

objections to this attempt to disparage the honest poverty of his clients, which only helped me call attention to the point.

The rest of the morning was taken up with technical evidence, identifying fragments of shells and rifling-marked bits of copper rotating-bands. I managed to get in the expensive and unusual character of the weapon several times.

Then the prosecution called in a witness named David Crockett Longfellow. I'd met him at the Hickock ranch; he was Hickock's butler. He limped from an old injury which had retired him from work on the range, and was sworn in, and testified to his name and occupation.

"Do you know these three defendants?" Goodham asked him.

"Yeah. I even marked one of them for identification," Longfellow replied.

Sidney was up at once, shouting objections. After he was quieted down, Goodham remarked that he'd come to that point later, and began to establish that Longfellow had been on the Hickock ranch on the day when Silas Cumshaw was killed.

"Now, on that date," Goodham said. "Will you relate to the court the matters of interest which came to your personal observation."

Longfellow began his story. "At about 0900, I was dustin'

up an' straightenin' things in the library; the Colonel was at his desk. All of a sudden, he said to me, 'Davy suppose you call the Solar Embassy and see if Silas is doin' anything today; if he isn't, ask him if he wants to come out.' So I called the Solar League Embassy. After a while, Mr. Thrombley answered; and I ast him was Mr. Cumshaw around. By this time, the Colonel got through with what he was doin' at the desk an' come over to the screen; he spoke to Mr. Thrombley, an' then Mr. Cumshaw came on the screen. I went back to my work; I heard the Colonel askin' Mr. Cumshaw could he come out for the day, an' Mr. Cumshaw sayin', yes, he could; he'd be out by about 1030.

"So, around then, I made a point to be at the front door, because I liked Mr. Cumshaw an' wanted to say hello to him. He was an awful nice gentleman; never had nothin' but a smile an' a pleasant word for anybody.

"Well, 'long about 1030, he came in an' landed on the drive, about a hundred feet from the outside veranda steps, an' got out, like he usually did, stoppin' to look around before he came over to the front steps.

"Then, this other car came droppin' in from outa nowhere, an' landed. I didn't pay it much mind; thought it might be Herr Judenhetzer, 'r Mynheer van Rijn, 'r Mr.

Nanadabadian, 'r one of the other Ambassadors, that Mr. Cumshaw'd brung along. But Mr. Cumshaw turned around, like he was surprised, an' looked at it, an then he started t' run fer the veranda. I was standin' in the door when I seen him startin' t' run. I jumped out on the porch, quick-like, an' pulled my gun, an' then this machine-rifle begun firin' outa the other car. So I flopped on the veranda an' started shootin' back. There was only eight 'r ten shots fired from this car, but most of them hit Mr. Cumshaw. They was explosives—most of them went right through him before they burst, otherwise he'da been blowed to hamburger."

Goodham waited a few moments. Longfellow's voice had choked and there was a twitching about his face, as though he were trying to suppress tears.

"Now, Mr. Longfellow," Goodham said, "did you recognize the people who were in the car from which the shots came?"

"Yeah. Like I said, I cut a mark on one of them. That one there; Jack-High Abe Bonney. He was handlin' the gun. I was tryin' for his head, but I always overshoot, so I have the habit of holdin' low. This time I held too low." He looked at Jack-High in coldly poisonous hatred. "I'll be sorry about that as long as I live."

"And who else was in the car?"

"The other two curs outa the same litter; Switchblade an' Turkey-Buzzard, over there."

"And what happened after they shot Mr. Cumshaw and you shot Jack-High Abe?"

"They took off, right away, headin' south. Then somebody got the AA-gun goin'. I seen eight-ten shells burst right behind the car. There musta been at least one hit; I seen the car turn end-for-end, an' then right itself. 'Bout five minutes later, some of the boys got a couple of herdin'-planes into the air an' took off after them, an' a little later they started movin' the armor out."

Goodham went to the middle table and picked up a heavy automatic pistol.

"I call the Court's attention to this pistol; it is an 11-mm automatic, manufactured by the Colt Firearms of New Texas, a licensed subsidiary of the Colt Firearms Company of Terra." He handed it to Longfellow. "Do you know this pistol?" he asked.

Longfellow was almost insulted by the question. Of course he knew it; it was his pistol. He recited the serial number, and pointed to different scars and scratches on the weapon, telling how they had been acquired.

"The Court accepts that Mr. Longfellow knows his own weapon," Nelson said,

"That's all. Your witness, Mr. Sidney," Goodham said.

Sidney began an immediate attack. He questioned Longfellow's eyesight, intelligence, honesty and integrity; he tried to show personal enmity toward the Bonneys; he implied that Longfellow had been conspiring with Cumshaw to bring about the conquest of New Texas by the Solar League. The verbal exchange became so heated that both witness and attorney had to be admonished repeatedly from the bench. But at no point did Sidney shake Longfellow from his one fundamental statement, that the Bonney brothers had shot Silas Cumshaw and that he had shot Jack-High Abe Bonney in the shoulder.

When he was finished, I got up and took over.

"Mr. Longfellow, you say that Mr. Thrombley answered the screen at the Solar League Embassy," I began. "You know Mr. Thrombley?"

He did. I continued:

"Well, beside yourself and Colonel Hickock and Mr. Cumshaw and possibly Mr. Thrombley, who else knew that Mr. Cumshaw would be at the ranch at 1030 on that morning?"

Nobody. But the aircar had been waiting; the Bonneys must have had advance knowledge. More objections from Sidney.

It was then a few minutes before noon, so Judge Nel-

son recessed court for an hour and a half. I had lunch with Colonel Hickock and Gail; when Court reconvened in the afternoon Sidney, whose spies must have been following us, tried to blow that up to a corrupt deal between the Solar League and the prosecution.

In the afternoon, the surgeon who had treated Jack-High Abe Bonney's wound testified, identifying the bullet he had extracted from Bonney's shoulder. A ballistics man from Ranger crime-lab followed and testified that it had been fired from Longfellow's Colt. Then the president-judge's son, the Ranger captain, took the stand. His testimony was about what he had given me at the Embassy, with the exception that the Bonney's admission that they had shot Ambassador Cumshaw was ruled out as having been made under duress. Then the cover was stripped off the aircar, and a couple of men with a power-dolly dragged it out in front of the bench. Nelson identified it; he went over it with an ultraviolet flashlight and showed where he had written his name and the date on it with fluorescent ink. The effects of AA-fire were plainly evident.

The other shrouded object Colonel Hickock identified as the gun with which he had fired on the aircar, and the aircar as his target. Finally, the ballistics-sharps were brought back to the stand

again, to link the two by means of fragments found in the car.

Sidney refrained from any cross-examination. Then Goodham brought Kettle-Belly Sam Bonney to the stand.

The Mayor of Bonneyville was a man of fifty or so, short, partially bald, dressed in faded blue levis, a frayed white shirt, and a grease-spotted vest. There was absolutely no mystery about how he had acquired his nickname. He disgorged a cud of tobacco into a spittoon, took the oath with unctuous solemnity, and then reloaded himself with another chew.

At about 1045 on the day in question, he testified, he had been in his office, which was located in what he called the Municipal Building of Bonneyville, hard at work in the public service, when an air-car, partially disabled by gunfire, had landed in the street outside and the three defendants had rushed in, claiming sanctuary. From then on, the story flowed along smoothly, following the lines predicted by Captain Nelson and Parros. Of course he had given the fugitives shelter; they had claimed to have been near to a political assassination and were in fear of their lives. Of course he had resisted the illegal attack by the Hickock outfit. Of course the boys were relatives of his. Certainly he knew

them; fine young men, best type of New Texan manhood. (Judge Nelson almost wore out his gavel before the bedlam of hoots and derisory laughter from the spectators' seats was stilled.) Sure they'd gotten in trouble once or twice; a poor man always got in trouble if the rich guys had it in for him. And so on, and so on.

Under Sidney's cross-examination, and coaching, he poured out the story of Bonneyville's wrongs at the hands of the grasping capitalists and reactionary landowners, and the atrocious behavior of the Hickock goon-gang. Finally, after extracting the last drop of class-hatred venom out of him, Sidney turned him over to me.

"How many men were inside the jail when the three defendants came claiming sanctuary?" I asked.

He couldn't rightly say: maybe four or five.

"Closer twenty five, according to the Rangers. How many of them were prisoners in the jail?"

"Well, none. The prisoners was all turned out that mornin'. They was just common drunks, disorderly conduct cases, that kinda thing. We turned them out so's we could make some repairs; we didn't want them in the road."

"You turned them out because you expected to have to defend the jail. When these three best types of New Tex-

an manhood would be along claiming sanctuary, with Colonel Hickock's ranch-hands right on their heels, didn't you?" I demanded.

It took a good five minutes before Sidney stopped shouting long enough for Judge Nelson to sustain the objection.

"You knew these young men all their lives, I take it. What did you know about their financial circumstances, for instance?"

"Well, like I already said; they've been ground down and kept poor by the big ranchers and the money-guys..."

"Yes, I recall. God forbid that I get you started on that again! So weren't you surprised to see them driving such an expensive aircar?"

"I don't know as it's such an expensive..." He shut his mouth suddenly.

"You know where they got the money to buy that car?"

Kettle-Belly Sam didn't answer.

"From the man who paid them to murder Ambassador Silas Cumshaw?" I kept on pressing. "Do you know how much they were paid for that job? Do you know where the money came from? Do you know who the go-between was, and how much he got, and how much he kept for himself? Was it the same source as that from which the money for the recent attempt on President Hutchinson's life came?"

"Wait a minute, Ambassador," one of the associate judges interrupted. "You've been asking some right interesting questions, there. I'd like to hear answers to a few; I've been getting sort of curious about some of those points, myself. Especially that last one."

"I refuse to answer!" the witness declared, trying to shove his chest out about half as far as his midriff. "On the grounds that it might incriminate or degrade me!"

Bonney left the stand and went out the side door. In a few minutes, before the next witness could be sworn, he was back.

"Your Honors!" he addressed the bench. "I claim sanctuary on the grounds that I have reason to believe that my life is in danger because of political enmity!"

"It's just those boys outside that's havin' the tug-of-war, your Honors," the bailiff who had followed Kettle-Belly Sam explained. "They're singin' a little song while they pick sides. *Hang Sam Bonney to a sour-apple tree. Hang Sam Bonney...*"

"Sanctuary granted," Judge Nelson grinned. "Take him away, bailiff."

"Now, your Honors," Goodham said, "I believe that the prosecution has succeeded in definitely establishing that these three defendants actually did fire the shots which, on April 22, 2193, deprived Silas

Cumshaw of his life and the Galaxy of a beloved and honored statesman. We will now undertake to prove..."

Followed a long succession of witnesses, each testifying to some noble trait of character of the late Silas Cumshaw. It was the sort of thing which the defense lawyer in the Whately case had been so willing to stipulate. Finally, the prosecution rested its case.

I entertained Gail and her father at the Embassy, that evening. The street outside was crowded with New Texans, all of them on our side, shouting slogans like "Hang the Bonneys!" and "Vengeance for Cumshaw!" and "Annexation Now!" Some of it was entirely spontaneous, too. The Hickocks, father and daughter, were given a tremendous ovation, when they finally left. I saw one big banner, lettered: **DON'T LET NEW TEXAS GO TO THE DOGS!** and bearing a crude picture of a Srauff. I seemed to recall having seen a couple of our Marines making that banner, the evening before, in the Embassy patio, but...

The next morning, the third of the trial, opened with the defense witnesses, character-witnesses for the three killers and witnesses to the political iniquities of Silas Cumshaw. Neither Goodham nor I bothered to cross-examine the former. I couldn't see how any lawyer as shrewd as Sidney

had shown himself to be would even dream of getting such a rabble into court as character witnesses for anybody. The latter, on the other hand, we went after unmercifully, revealing, under their enmity for Cumshaw, a small, hard, core of bigoted xenophobia and selfish fear. Goodham did a beautiful job; he seemed able, at a glance, to divine exactly each witness's motivation and able to make him or her betray that motivation in its least admirable terms. Finally the defense rested, about a quarter-hour before noon.

I rose and addressed the court:

"Your Honors, while both the prosecution and the defense have done an admirable job in bringing out the essential facts of how my predecessor met his death, there are many features about this case which are far from clear to me; they will be even less clear to my Government, which is composed of men who have never set foot on this planet. For this reason, I wish to call, or recall, certain witnesses to clarify these points."

"Well, like I said before, Mr. Silk, you asked Kettle-Billy Sam Bonney a flock of questions I'd like to hear answers to," the elderly associate judge who had interrupted me a little earlier said. "Will these witnesses of yours, now, be able to let a lit-

tle light in on some of those questions?"

"I believe they will, your Honor. Quite a bit of light," I smiled.

"Then we want to hear them! How about it?" he asked the others.

Sidney, who had begun shouting objections as soon as I had gotten to my feet, finally managed to get himself recognized by the Court.

"This Solar League Ambassador, your Honors, is simply trying to use the Courts of the Planet of New Texas as a sounding-board for his imperialistic Government's propaganda..."

"You may reassure yourself, Mr. Sidney," Judge Nelson said. "This Court will not allow itself to be improperly used, or improperly swayed, by the Ambassador of the Solar League. This Court is interested only in determining the facts regarding the case before it... You may call your witnesses, Mr. Ambassador." He glanced at his watch. "Court will now recess for an hour and a half; can you have them here by 1330?"

I assured him I could, after glancing across the room at Ranger Captain Nelson and catching his nod.

My first witness, that afternoon, was Thrombley. After the formalities of getting his name and connection with the Solar League Embassy on the record, I asked him about the call from the

Hickock ranch. His account matched with Longfellow's.

"You heard Mr. Cumshaw tell Colonel Hickock that he would be out at the ranch at about 1030?" I asked. Thrombley said he had. "And, to your knowledge, did anybody else at the Embassy hear that?"

"Oh, no, sir; we were in the Ambassador's Private office, and the screen there is tap-proof."

"So, when Mr. Cumshaw left for the Hickock ranch, you were the only person at the Embassy who knew where he was going?"

"That's correct, sir."

"And what other calls did you receive, prior to Mr. Cumshaw's death?"

"About fifteen minutes after Mr. Cumshaw had left, the Srauff Ambassador called, about a personal matter. As he was most anxious to contact Mr. Cumshaw, I told him where he had gone."

"Then, to your knowledge, outside of yourself, Colonel Hickock, and his butler, Mr. Longfellow, the Srauff Ambassador was the only person who could have known that Mr. Cumshaw's car would be landing on Colonel Hickock's drive at or about 1030; is that correct?"

"Yes, plus anybody whom the Srauff Ambassador might have told."

"Exactly!" I pounced. Then I turned and gave the three Bonney brothers a sweeping

glance. "Plus anybody the Srauff Ambassador might have told!"

That started a brief bedlam in the spectators' seats, and it brought Sidney to his feet in a bound.

"Your Honors!" he howled. "Now, I trust, you see the force of my objection! The Solar Ambassador is trying to use this Court to provoke an interstellar war!"

"I don't see anything of the kind," Judge Nelson told him. "The men who shot Ambassador Cumshaw obviously knew when and where they could find him in the sights of their weapon. The manner in which they gained this information is certainly pertinent to this trial. Proceed, Mr. Ambassador."

"That's all," I said. "Your witness, Mr. Goodham."

"No questions. Your witness, Mr. Sidney."

Sidney got up, started toward the witness-stand, and then thought better of it.

"No questions," he said.

The next witness was a Mr. James Finnegan, cashier of the Crooked Creek Planetary Bank. I asked him if Kettle-Belly Sam Bonney did business at his bank; he said yes.

"Anything unusual about Mayor Bonney's account?" I asked.

"Well, it's been unusually active, lately. Ordinarily, he carries around two—three thousand pesos, but about the

first of April, that took a big jump. Two hundred and fifty thousand pesos, all in a lump."

"When did Kettle-Belly Sam deposit this large sum?" I asked.

"He didn't. The money came to us in a cashier's check on the Ranchers' Trust Company of New Austin, with an anonymous letter asking that it be deposited to Mayor Bonney's account. The letter was typed on a sheet of yellow paper, in dog-talk."

"Dog-talk?" I repeated.

"I beg your pardon, sir. A colloquial expression we have for Basic English. The only form of English the Srauff will admit understanding."

"Do you have that letter now?" I asked.

"No, I don't. After we'd recorded the new balance, Kettle Belly came storming in, raising hell because we'd recorded it. He told me if we ever got another deposit like that, to turn it over to him in cash. Then he wanted to see the letter, and when I gave it to him, he took it over to a telescreen booth, and drew the curtains. I got busy with other matters, and the next time I looked, Kettle-Belly was gone and some girl was using the booth."

"That's very interesting, Mr. Finnegan. Was that the last of your unusual business with Mayor Bonney?"

"Oh, no. This happened about two weeks before Mr. Cumshaw was killed. Then a

week later, Kettle-Belly came in and wanted 50,000 pesos, in a hurry, in cash, in small bills. I gave it to him, and he upset a bottle of red permanent, the sort we use to refill our bank seals. Three of the bills got splashed; I offered to exchange them, but he just said, 'Hell with it; I'm in a hurry,' and went out. The next day, Switchblade Joe Bonney came in to make a payment on a note we are holding on him. He used those three bills in the payment.

"Then, about a week ago, there was another cashier's check came in for Kettle-Belly. This time, there was no letter; just one of our regular deposit slips. I held the check, and gave it to Kettle-Belly. I remember, when it came in, I said to one of the clerks, 'Well, I wonder who's going to get bumped off, this time.' And sure enough..."

Sidney's yell of, "Object-in!" was all his previous objections gathered into one.

"You say the letter accompanying the first deposit, the one in Basic English, was apparently taken away by Kettle-Belly Sam Bonney. If you saw another letter of the same sort, would you be able to say whether or not it might be like the one you mentioned?"

I asked permission to have another witness sworn while Finnegan was still on the stand, and called in a Mr. Bone, the cashier of the

Packers' & Brokers' Trust Company of New Austin. He had with him a letter, typed on yellow paper, which he said had accompanied an anonymous deposit of two hundred thousand pesos. Mr. Finnegan said that it was exactly like the one he had received, in typing, grammar composition, and wording, all but the name of the person to whose account the money was to be deposited.

"And whose account received this anonymous benefaction, Mr. Boone?" I asked.

"The account," Boone replied, "of Mr. Clement A. Sidney."

I was surprised that Judge Nelson didn't break the handle of his gavel, after that. Finally, after a couple of threats to clear the court, order was restored. Mr. Sidney had no questions to ask this time, either.

The bailiff looked at the next slip of paper I gave him, frowned over it, and finally asked the court for assistance.

"I can't pernounce this-here thing, atall!" he said.

One of the judges finally got out a mouthfull of growls and yaps, and gave it to the clerk of the court to copy into the record. The next witness was a Srauff.

After he took the stand, the clerk of the court looked at him blankly for a moment. Then he turned to Judge Nelson.

"Your Honor; how am I

gonna go about swearing him in?" he asked. "What does a Srauff swear by, that's binding?"

The President Judge frowned for a moment. "Does anybody here know Basic well enough to translate the oath?" he asked.

"I think I can," I offered. "I spent a great many years in our Consular Service. We use Basic with many alien peoples."

"Well, will our oath, based on the Christian religion, be binding in this case?" Goodham asked.

"I wouldn't know." Judge Nelson said. "But the law on perjury is."

"Have you knowledge," I asked, "that if you say things not true here, it will be against the law, and you will get punishment from the law for it?"

"Yes; I have such knowledge?"

"Administer the regular oath, then," Nelson told the clerk of the court.

"Raise your right hand do you swear before almighty god searcher of all hearts that in the evidence which you are about to give you will tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth and so may you answer in the last great day do you so swear?"

The Srauff blinked. "Please; I have not knowledge of all the words he says," he said. "I will not say yes to words not part of my knowledge."

"Put up right hand," I told him. "Do you truly say, in front of Great One who made all worlds, who has knowledge of what is in all persons' hearts, that what you will say here will be true, all true, and not anything that is not true, and will you so say again at time when all worlds end? Do you so truly say?"

"Yes. I so truly say."

"Say your name."

"Ppmegll Kkuvtmmecc Cicici."

"What is your business?"

"I put things made of cloth into this world, and I take meat out of this world."

"Where do you have your house?"

"Here in New Austin, over my house of business, on Coronado Street."

"What people do you see in this place that you have made business with?"

Ppmegll Kkuvtmmecc Cicici pointed a three-fingered hand at the Bonney brothers.

"What business did you have with them?"

"I gave them for money a machine which goes on the ground and goes in the air very fast, to take persons and things about."

"Is that the thing you gave them for money?" I asked, pointing at the exhibit air-car.

"Yes, but it was new, then; it has been made broken by things from guns now."

"What money did they give you for the machine?"

"One hundred pesos."

"Mr. Ambassador," one of the associate-judges interrupted. "I used to be in the used-car business. Am I expected to believe that this... this being... sold that aircar for a hundred pesos?"

"Here's a notorized copy of the bill of sale, from the office of the Vehicles Registration Bureau," I said. "I introduce it as evidence."

I handed the paper across the bench. A couple of the associate judges looked at it, and gave it back.

"This stinks!" the former used car dealer told me. "I'm mighty glad, Mr. Ambassador, that you've lifted the cover off it, though."

I acknowledged his remark and turned back to my witness.

"Did you make money on this business?" I asked.

"No; the money I got from these persons was only for the trouble that the business was to me."

There was a disturbance at the back of the room, and then the Srauff Ambassador, Gglafr Ddespttann Vuvuvu, came stalking down the aisle, followed by a couple of Rangers and two of his attache's. He came forward and addressed the court.

"May you be happy, sir but I am here so quickly not because I have desire to make noise, but because it is only short time since it got in my knowledge that one of my persons is in this place; I am here to be of help to him that

he not get in trouble, and be of help to you. The name for what I am to do in this place is not part of my knowledge; please say it for me."

"You are a friend of the court," Judge Nelson told him. "*An amicus curiae.*"

"You make me happy. Please go on; I have no desire to put stop to what you do in this place."

"From what person did you get this machine that you gave to these persons for one hundred pesos? I asked.

Gglafr Etcetera immediately began barking and snarling and yelping at my witness. The drygoods importer looked startled and Judge Nelson banged his gavel.

"That's enough of that! There'll be nothing spoken in this court but English, except through a sworn interpreter!"

"Yow! I am sad that what I did was not right," the Srauff Ambassador replied contritely. "But my person here has not as part of his knowledge that you will make him say what may put him in trouble."

Nelson nodded in agreement. I think he had noticed that Gglafr had showed understanding of a couple of non-Basic words; if so he ignored it. He thought for a moment trying to frame his reply. Basic English is quite easy for anybody who does not speak English and quite hard for anybody who does;

the problem for the latter being to remember what words to exclude.

"You are right; this person who is here has no need to make answer to any question if it may put him in trouble or make him seem less than he is."

"I will not make answer," the witness said.

"No further questions."

I turned to Goodham, and then to Sidney; they had no questions, either. I handed another slip of paper to the bailiff, and after the same procedure as in the case of Ppmegll Kkuvttmmecc Cicici, another Srauf, named Bbrarkk Jjoknyyegg Kekeke took the stand.

He put into this world things for small persons to make amusement with; he took out of this world meat and leather. He had his house and his house of business in New Austin, and he pointed out the three Bonneys as persons in this place that he saw tho he had seen before.

"And what business did you make with them?" I asked.

"I gave them for money a gun, which sends out things of twenty millimeters very fast, to make death or hurt come to men and animals and do destruction to machines and things."

"Is this the gun?" I showed it to him.

"It could be. The gun was made in my world; many guns like it are made there. I am

not certain that this is the very gun."

I had a notorized copy of a custom-house bill in which the gun was described and specified by serial number. I introduced it as evidence.

"How much money did these three persons give you for this gun?" I asked.

"Five pesos."

That, I recalled, had been the valuation placed on the machete with which Wilbur Whately had killed Senator Maverick. About ten voices, from the back of the room, were asking if Mr. Kekeke had any more for sale at that price.

"The customs appraisal on this gun is six hundred pesos," I mentioned.

Immediately, Ambassador Vuvuvu was on his feet. "My person here has not as part of his knowledge that he may put himself in trouble by what he says to answer these questions."

That put a stop to that. Bbrarkk Jjoknyyegg Kekeke immediately took refuge in refusal to answer on grounds of self-incrimination.

"That is all, your Honors," I said. "And now," I continued, when the witness had left the stand, "I have something further to present to the Court, speaking both as *amicus curiae* and as Ambassador of the Solar League. This Court cannot convict the three men who are here on trial. These men should have

never have been brought to trial in this court; it has no jurisdiction over this case. This was a simple case of first-degree murder, by hired assassins committed against the Ambassador of one Government at the instigation of another, not an act of political protest within the meeting of New Texan law."

There was a brief silence; both the Court and the spectators were stunned, and most stunned of all were the three Bonney brothers, who had been watching, fear-sick, while I had been putting a rope around their necks. The uproar from the rear of the courtroom gave Judge Nelson a needed minute or so to collect his thoughts. After he had gotten order restored, he turned to me, grim-faced.

"Mr. Silk, will you please elaborate on the extraordinary statement you have just made," he invited, as though every word had sharp corners that were sticking in his throat.

"Gladly, your Honor." My words, too, were gouging and scraping my throat as they came out; I could feel my knees getting absurdly weak, and my mouth tasted as though I had an old copper penny in it. "As I understand it, the laws of New Texas do not extend their ordinary protection to persons engaged in the practice of politics. An act of personal injury against a politician is considered

criminal only to the extent that the politician injured has not, by his public acts, deserved the degree of severity with which he has been injured, and the Court of Political Justice is established for the purpose of determining whether or not there has been such an excess of severity in the treatment meted out by the accused to the injured or deceased politician. This gives rise, of course, to some interesting practices; for instance, what is at law a trial of the accused is, in substance, a trial of his victim. But in any case tried in this Court, the accused must be a person who has injured or killed a man who is definable as a practicing politician under the Government of New Texas.

"Speaking for my Government, therefore, I must deny that these three men should have been tried in this court for the murder of Silas Cumshaw; to do otherwise would establish the principle that our Ambassador, or any other Ambassador here, is a practicing politician under the laws and Government of New Texas. This would not only make of any Ambassador a permissible target for any marksman who happened to disapprove of the policies of his Government, but, more serious, it would place him and his Government in a subordinate position relative to the Government of New Texas. This the Government of the Solar

League simply cannot tolerate, for reasons which it would be insulting to the intelligence of this Court to enumerate."

That was what the other diplomats present as friends of the court had been waiting for. They were all on their feet at once, shouting agreement.

"Mr. Silk," Judge Nelson said gravely, "this court takes full cognizance of the force of your arguments. However, I'd like to know why you permitted this trial to run to this length before entering this objection. Surely you could have made clear the position of your Government at the beginning of the trial."

"Your Honor," I said, "Had I done so, these defendants would have been released, and the facts behind their crime would have never come to light. I grant that the important function of this Court is to determine questions of guilt and innocence. We must not lose sight, however, of the fact that the primary function of any court is to determine the truth, and only by the process of trial could the real author of the crime be uncovered."

"This was important, both for the Government of the Solar League and the Government of New Texas. My Government now knows who procured the death of Silas Cumshaw, and we will take ap-

propriate action. The Government of New Texas has now had spelled out, in letters anyone can read, the fact that this beautiful planet is in truth a battleground. Awareness of this may save New Texas from being the scene of a larger and more destructive battle. New Texas also knows who are its enemies, and who can be counted upon to stand as its friends."

"Yes, Mr. Silk. Mr. Vuvuvu, I haven't heard any comment from you... No comment? Well, we'll have to close the court, to consider this phase of the question"

The black screen slid up, for the first time during the trial. There was silence for a moment, and then the room became a bubbling pot of sound. The three Bonneys, after gaping in incomprehension at me, finally realized that their necks were safe; they jumped to their feet and began pumping each others' hands. A Srauff attache hurried to confer with Sidney; Sidney pushed him away, and I caught the words: "Get the hell out of here, you flea-bitten..."

Gail Hickock, who had been sitting on the front row of the spectators' seats, came running up while I was still receiving the congratulations of my fellow diplomats.

"Stephen! How *could* you?" she demanded. "You know what you've done? You've gotten those...those murder-

ing snakes...turned loose!"

Andrew Jackson Hickock left the prosecution table and approached.

"Mr. Silk! You've just secured the freedom of three men who murdered one of my best friends..."

"Switchblade Joe Bonney, Jack-High Abe Bonney, Turkey-Buzzard Tom Bonney, together with your counsel, approach the Court and hear the verdict," Judge Nelson said.

The three defendants and their lawyer rose. The Bonneys were swaggering and laughing, but for a lawyer whose clients just emerged from the shadow of the gallows, Sidney was looking remarkably unhappy. He probably had imagination enough to see what would be waiting for him outside.

"It pains me inexpressibly," Judge Nelson said, "to inform you three excrescences on an otherwise fair and lovely planet than this Court cannot convict you of the cowardly murder of that gentle, kindly, learned and honorable old man, Silas Cumshaw, nor can you be brought to trial in any other court on New Texas again for that dastardly crime. Here are your weapons, which must be returned to you; sort them out yourselves, because I won't dirty my fingers on them. And may you regret and feel shame for your despicable act as long as you live, and I hope that won't be more than a few hours."

With that, he used the end of his gavel to push the three belts off the bench and onto the floor at the Bonneys' feet. They stood laughing at him for a few moments, then stooped, picked the belts up, drew the pistols to check magazines and chambers, and then began slapping each other's back and shouting jubilant congratulations at one another. Sidney's two assistants came up and began pumping Sidney's hand; some of the ignobility, male and female, who had appeared as character witnesses, came crowding up, and the two Socialists who had been sitting among the friends of the court joined the mob in the front.

"There!" Gail flung at me. "Now look at your masterpiece! Why don't you go up and congratulate them, too?"

And with that, she slapped me across the face. It hurt like the devil.

"In about two minutes," I told her, "you can apologize to me for that, or weep over my corpse. Right now, though, you'd better be getting behind something solid."

I turned and stepped forward to confront the Bonneys, mentally thanking Gail. Up until she's slapped me, I'd been weak-kneed and dry-mouthed with what I had to do. Now I was just plain angry, and I found that I was thinking a lot more clearly. Jack-High Bonney's wounded left shoulder, I knew,

wouldn't keep him from using his gun-hand, but his shoulder muscles would be stiff enough to slow his draw. I'd intended saving him until I'd dealt with his brothers; now I remembered how he'd gotten that wound in the first place. He'd been the one who'd used the machine-rifle, out at the Hickock ranch.

So I changed my plans and moved him up to top priority—very much so.

"Hold it!" I yelled at them. "You've been cleared of killing a politician, but you still have killing a Solar League Ambassador to answer for. Now get your hands full of guns, if you don't want to die with them empty!"

The crowd of sympathizers and felicitators simply exploded away from the Bonney brothers. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sidney and a fat, blowzy woman with brass-colored hair inextricably tangled as they both tried to dive under the friends-of-the-court table at the same place. The Bonney brothers simply stood and stared at me, for an instant, unbelievably, as I got my thumbs on the release-studs of my belt. Judge Nelson's gavel was hammering, and he was shouting:

"Court - of - Political - Justice - Confederate - Continents - of - New - Texas - is herewith - adjourned - reconvene - 0900 - tomorrow! HIT THE FLOOR!"

"Damn! He means it!"

Switchblade Joe exclaimed.

Then they all reached for their guns. They were still reaching when I pressed the studs and the Krupp-Tattas popped up into my hands, and I swung up my right-hand gun and shot Jack-High through the head. After that, I just let my subconscious take over. I saw gun-flames jump out at me from the Bonney's weapons, and I felt my own pistols leap and writhe in my hands, but I don't believe I was aware of hearing the shots, not even my own. The whole thing probably lasted five seconds, but it seemed like twenty minutes to me. Then there was nobody shooting at me, and nobody for me to shoot at, and the big room was silent, and I was aware that Judge Nelson and his associates were rising cautiously from behind the bench.

I holstered my left-hand gun and removed and replaced the magazine of the right-hand gun, then holstered it and reloaded the other one. Hoddy Ringo and Francisco Parros and Commander Stonehenge were on their feet, their pistols drawn, covering the spectators' seats: Colonel Hickock had also drawn a pistol, and he was covering Sidney with it, and occasionally swinging the muzzle to the left to include the Srauff Ambassador and his two attaches. By this time, Nelson and the other eight judges were in their seats, trying to look

calm, unruffled and judicial.

"Your Honors," I said. "I fully realize that no judge likes to have his court turned into a shooting-gallery. I can assure your Honors, however, that my action here was not the result of any lack of respect for this Court; it was pure necessity. Your Honors can see that. My Government simply could not permit this crime against its Ambassador to pass unpunished. I understand your statute laws far too little, your Honors, but your traditions are part of the imperishable heritage of Terra, and it was to your traditions that I appealed."

Whatever that meant. Texas on Terra was forty two light-years and an entire universe of the mind away. Judge Nelson nodded solemnly.

"Court was adjourned when this little incident happened, Mr. Silk," he said. "I trust that nobody will construe my unofficial and personal comments here as establishing any legal precedent, and I wouldn't like to see this sort of thing become customary..." He leaned forward and looked to where the three Bonney brothers were making a mess of blood on the floor. "Did you do all that yourself, with those little bean-shooters, Mr. Silk?" he asked.

I thanked him, and turned to the Srauff Ambassador. I didn't bother putting my remarks into Basic.

"Look, Fido," I told him.

"My Government is quite well aware of the source from which the orders for the murder of my predecessor came. These men I just killed were only the tools. We're going to get the brain behind them, if we have to send every ship of war we own into the Srauff Star-Cluster."

That, of course, wasn't exactly striped-pants diplomatic language—"my Government must caution your Government...takes a very serious view...grave consequences," and that sort of thing. But it seemed to be the kind language Mr. Vuvuvu understood. He skinned back his upper lip at me and began snarling and growling, and then he turned on his hind paws and padded angrily down the aisle.

The spectators above and around him began barking and baying and yelling: "Tie a can to his tail!" and, "Git for home, Bruno!" Then somebody yelled, "Hey, look! Even his wrist-watch is blushing!"

That was perfectly true. Mr. Gglafr Ddesptann Vuvuvu's watch-face, normally white, was now glowing a bright ruby-red.

I looked at Stonehenge and he looked at me. It would be full dark in four or five hours; there ought to be something spectacular to see in the cloudless skies of Capella IV tonight. Fleet Admiral Sir Rodney Tregaskis would see to that.

the
lady
from
aldebaran

by . . . EVELYN E. SMITH

Many of the formerly under-privileged terrestrials apparently felt that one vote was not quite enough for them . .

"LOOK HERE!" Mr. Cassidy exclaimed in exasperation. He had had a long and trying morning. "Horses can't vote!"

The mare tossed her head and dropped a paper from her teeth to the table before him. It was a diploma certifying that she had been graduated with honors from the Peabody Equestrian Academy.

Before Mr. Cassidy could question the value of this document, there was a crash as she nearly buried him under the weight of dozens of wooden alphabet blocks, which she released from a canvas bag. By the time he had dug his way out, she had already arranged the following message on the table with her hoof: "Cogito, ergo sum. And I am literate; therefore I may vote."

"She's right, Pat," Mr. O'Toole, the other Universalist registration officer, pointed out. "It's the new law. Any life form that's literate and a citizen can register for the elections."

"Seems quite in order," Mr. Vandernoot, the Federationalist registrar murmured, tak-

Now that the Elections are over, to our individual relief or otherwise, we can perhaps appreciate, with more objectivity, the problems that an Elections official will have to face in the year X. Evelyn E. Smith, who needs no introduction to any reader of SF, describes how it would not only be a question of whom to vote for—there would be interesting ramifications to the added problem of how for some of the new citizens.

ing in the large illuminated "Vote for Otto Is my Motto" button on her rose pink blanket.

"But can she prove she's a responsible citizen?" Mr. Cassidy persisted.

The mare smugly offered a Terran birth certificate plus a card attesting to the fact that she was a full-time employee of Barnum and Bailey's Intergalactic Circus, and a union member in good standing.

"Okay." Mr. Cassidy gave up and handed her a registration form. "Just go into that booth there and put a check next to the party you belong to. Then drop the paper in the box."

The horse whinnied contemptuously and vanished behind the faded green curtain with a flirt of her tail.

Mr. Cassidy breathed a sigh of relief at the sight of the next registrant, a handsome two-headed young humanoid of Denebian extraction. Melvill Montgomery Ush seemed to offer no problem; he answered every question clearly and succinctly in pleasant tenor and baritone voices. The difficulty came only when Mr. Cassidy handed him a registration form. The blond head exposed white teeth. "One more form, please," he reminded Mr. Cassidy in a light voice.

"One more! What makes you think you rate two? Going to vote twice, I suppose?"

"Sure," the brunet head replied in deeper tones. "Melville is a Federalist and I belong to the Universal Party"

"But you can't have two votes," Mr. Cassidy protested. "There's only one of you."

"Come now, old boy—" Melville smiled engagingly "—you'd hardly expect a Federation man to vote Universalist."

"And I'm damned," snarled Montgomery, "if I'll cast my vote for that crooked Pforzheimer!"

"Otto Pforzheimer is a good man," remarked Mr. Vander-noot mildly.

"Burbage is a better one!" Cassidy roared.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, gentleman," protested the attendant police officer. "Why, this isn't even election day."

"Besides, it's none of your business for whom we vote," Montgomery went on. "We just want our right to vote for the candidate of our choice. As is only democratic."

A loud cheer arose from the queue of waiting citizens, only half of whom were actually human or humanoid. The others included winged creatures from Izar, herpetoid Difdans, musteline Yeddans ... beings whose races had originated all over the Galaxy, but who had themselves been born on Terra or had become citizens. Some wore complicated breathing appa-

ratases and helmets, but most were without, for a species that could not breathe the atmosphere of Terra comfortably would hardly choose to settle there on a permanent basis.

"It seems to me," murmured a naturalized Aldebaranian, wrapping her black and gold cloak still more tightly about her arthropod figure, unusually tall and impressive even for one of her species, "that if these young gentlemen—er—this young gentleman is—are—allowed two votes, then I should be allowed at least three, because the IQ of the average Aldebaranian is, very conservatively speaking, at least three times that of the average terrestrial."

"Now that's silly," Mr. O'Toole said, "because in the whole history of Terra suffrage has never been based on intelligence anyway."

"Exactly what I thought you were going to say," the Aldebaranian sighed.

"Of course," Cassidy sneered. "Nothing so clever about that. Everybody knows Aldebaranians are telepathic."

"Lissen," put in a human, "how about the privacy of the polls? How can we vote secretly with him reading our minds and knowing who we're gonna vote for?"

"Yeah.... Fair play, that's all we want.... Pooh to Aldebaran!" muttered the crowd. Terran space ships had first reached Aldebaran

only forty years before, and humans had not yet become reconciled to accepting the strange insect-like inhabitants of the system as fellow creatures, even though many of them had elected to become Terran citizens, and all appeared to be of amiable disposition. After all it was very well to be tolerant, but here was something *unnatural*, Terrans felt, about creatures able to read one's mind, as well as something decidedly uncomfortable.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the Aldebaranian said, in a voice that was pleasant but faintly metallic because the sounds were produced mechanically, telepaths having no vocal apparatus, "I can read all your minds and I haven't the faintest idea for whom you're going to vote. Because you don't know yourselves."

"Pforzheimer," murmured little Mr. Vandernoot, "is really quite a decent sort of chap."

"No electioneering at the polls!" the policeman cried, aghast. "I really would never have thought it of you, Mr. Vandernoot."

"I got quite carried away by patriotic enthusiasm," the Federationist apologized.

"Look here," snarled Montgomery, knitting his dark brows, "do we get two registrations forms or do we start to break up the place?"

"If he gets to get two

votes," said a human wearing the purple uniform of the mental deviant, "then I got to get two also because I'm a schizo."

"Venutians got four arms," put in a member of that race. "Maybe we don't think a lot but we work twice as hard. And the future of Terra rests in the hands of its workers; President Burbage said so himself on the video only the other day. So I think we should get two votes each, on account of we got four hands."

The crowd became restless. "How about Kiffans; they have three heads so they should get three votes!... Uranians! Vegans! We demand fair play; that's what we demand!"

"Ladies and gentlemen," announced the policeman, "should it prove necessary, I shall, regrettably have to meet force with force."

"Might doesn't make right," pointed out the Aldebaranian.

"You're abtholutely correct," lisped a herbaceous Ascellan, cowering into the safety of his jet-propelled flower pot. "Abtholutely correct."

"The policeman looked at the Aldebaranian coldly. "Perhaps you, sir or madam, would be kind enough to demonstrate just how sheer intellect could quell a fracas?"

The Aldebaranian shrugged. "At the very least, it would tell you that there is a Venitian behind you preparing to

swing with two shillelaghs."

The constable whirled, drawing his anaesthetic ray gun. The fracas was on.

The Aldebaranian showed her superior intellectual powers by quietly slipping out before she became involved in the fray. Word of the dissension had not yet spread abroad, and peaceful groups of citizens were watching an early afternoon torchlight parade for candidate Pforzheimer. There was a burst of stirring martial music, and, lit by a covey of self-illuminating Castorians who flew overhead, a huge scarlet and gold Fomahautian rolled down the road leading the band and at the same time acting drum by pounding on its sides. "Vote for Pforzheimer!" it boomed. "The candidate for tolerance!" Behind him marched assorted musicians, terrestrial and extra-terrestrial, some playing on Earth instruments—the Anchans had become past masters of the bassoon—some on native devices. Hundreds of tiny Ascellans, with petals of violet and rose and amber sparkling amid the verdant hues of their foliage formed the base of a beautiful float on which reclined a dozen scantily-draped human and humanoid females. On top of the float stood a verdigris-green Talithan, holding aloft a flickering native of Castor, and looking very much like

the lady of Bedloe's Island save for his three bulging eyes. "Pforzheimer and liberty!" he squeaked. "Pforzheimer and liberty!"

"A vote for Pforzheimer is a vote for Pforzheimer," clanged the Dschubbans, beating themselves like triangles as they whirled down the street.

"Nekkarians can't lie," shrieked one of that species sitting on the shoulders of a stalwart Yeddan, "and I say Pforzheimer is the only man for president!"

"Yeth, Nekkufrians can't lie," murmured the voice of the Ascellan who had prudently followed the Aldebaranian out of the registration center, "but they thertainly can be intokthicated. That one'th thoaked to the gills."

"But who *is* the only man for president?" the Aldebaranian insisted.

"Thearch me." The Ascellan genteely put up a leaf with hide a yawn. "The hell with the thuffrage, I thay." He tossed his petals. "Why should I wathte my time voting when life is short and I'm in bloom?" Jets flared briefly as his flower pot blasted off.

The Aldebaranian hailed a cruising helicab and gave the address of a quiet little cafe that catered to the less socially acceptable extraterrestrials. Another Aldebaranian Native awaited her there, his slender

golden figure decked in a jewelled robe of silver and turquoise guaze.

"Cut a little low at the thorax, isn't it Julian?" the newcomer ideated.

He pouted. "Oh, you're so stuffy, Shirley." (Both had adopted terrestrial prae-noms in order to conform as far as possible to the customs of their adopted planet.) "But I can see you're disturbed, dear. Tell me what's happened."

Shirley told him. "And the same thing will be happening in all the polling places," she concluded, as they inhaled a jug of guush together.

"Extraterrestrials, vote for Burbage, who gave you the right to vote," a loud speaker outside announced, and through the transparent plastiglass walls of the cafe the Aldebaranians could see a sonocopter swooping low over the street. "Vote for Burbage and vote for the future!"

With a harsh buzz, another copter cut in. "Vote for Pforzheimer and tolerance. Pforzheimer's platform is a vote for every individuality, regardless of the portion of body or number of bodies it has."

"You see" Shirley thought to Julian, "the opposition is already trying to take advantage."

There were shouts, screams, and howls from the terrestrials and extraterrestrials who thronged the street. "Pforzheimer! ... Burbage!

...Down with all humans!
..... Rrrrr." Humanoid
pummeled human. Animal at-
tacked vegetable. Dschubbans
rolled on Nekkarians. Ven-
utians got strangleholds on
Difdans. All was pandemon-
ium. Curses were shouted in
10,863 languages, including
dialects.

A little man who material-
ized in a time machine right
in the middle of the melee
murmured, "Gad the future
was never like this," and re-
turned to the fifty-first cen-
tury.

But what would you sug-
gest, Shirley?" Julian ideated.
"I'm sure if anyone could
think of a solution it would
be you."

She flicked her voice box
deprecatingly. "The problem,
as it stands, admits of no so-
lution. Take Mr. Ush, for ex-
ample. He seems to be the
test case. Certainly, as the
the possessor of two heads
with differing political sent-
iments, he is entitled to be
able to express his opinions."

"You're so right, dear."

"On the other hand, should
he be allotted two votes, I
then believe we Aldebarani-
ans should have three, for
we have three brains each.
Just because our brains work
as a unit, should we have few-
er votes than the uncoordinat-
ed lower life forms?"

"Of course not!" Julian
ideated indignantly.

"This is, as you know, Jul-
ian," Shirley went on, "a sit-

uation that we anticipated
some time ago, when we left
the rather crowded atmos-
phere of Aldebaran III for
the...er...frontiers of Terra..
Let me see, there must be sev-
eral millions of us here now."

"At least that."

"I shall get in thought con-
trol with all the other Alde-
baranians tonight. We will
solve Terra's problem for her.

"Attention citizens of Ter-
ra!" the video boomed, and
the spaceball game was re-
placed by the worried face of
Burbage. There was a collec-
tive gasp of astonishment,
President Burbage had never
before been known to deliver
an unscheduled speech; his
ghostwriters were too slow.

"All registrations for the
polls has been halted," the
president announced, "as a
result of violence at many
of the registration centers.
In fact," he wailed, "there is;
rioting all over Terra." He
paused, removed his specta-
cles to wipe away a tear, and
resumed more calmly, "My
friends, you all know that
in this election Terran citi-
zens of extraterrestrial ori-
gin are being allowed to vote
for the first time in history.
Any life form that is intelli-
gent, literate, was born on
Terra or naturalized here,
and who can show that he is
a responsible member of the
community—that is, a work-
er, a scholar, an aristocrat of
independent means, or an in-

mate of a certified institution—is permitted to vote.”

“Hear, hear!” shouted three Martians.

“However, many of the formerly underprivileged extraterrestrials seem to believe that one vote is not enough for them.” He paused for his auditors to appreciate the enormity of this. “They demand two votes, three, even four apiece. But one vote has always been considered ample by the human beings who are, after all, indigenous to this fair planet.”

“When the extraterrestrials campaigned for suffrage,” he went on, “all they asked was one vote each. Is it true that they really feel they are entitled to more or have they become the unwitting tools of forces inimical to your fine, honest administration? I will name no names and mention no opposition parties... The matter,” he concluded austere, “is being brought before the Wise Ones in Washington tomorrow, but we hope that before then the misguided extraterrestrials will see the light.”

His face turned lime green, owing to a defect in the mechanism, and then vanished.

“Melville Montgomery Ush,” President Burbage said sternly, turning his better profile toward the video camera, “as the instigator of all this dissension—”

“Oh, come now,” Melville murmured, “hardly the instigator. Merely defending our rights, you know.”

“I instigated it,” said Montgomery, “and I’m glad.”

“Order!” screamed the Speaker of the Wise Ones, ringing his trident on the Rostrum. “Or-der!”

President Burbage nodded affably at the Speaker and then returned to Ush. “Sir, you have been called before an extraordinary session of the Council of Wise Ones to explain your reasons for acting in the way you did.”

“Give ‘em an inch and they’ll take an ell!” shouted a Wise One. “It was a mistake to give extraterrestrials the vote! Let ‘em go back where they came from...”

“Order!” shouted the Speaker. “Order!”

“The gentleman from the South Pole,” President Burbage said, unleashing his celebrated smile, “is hasty. There is no reason why suffrage should be limited to human beings. Any intelligent life form should have the right to vote.”

“That would let you out, Burbage!” shouted a shrill voice from the rear of the spectators’ gallery. President Burbage turned pale with anger and waited ostentatiously until a small, protesting Spican had been borne out by two burly robot guards.

“Any intelligent life form should have the right to vote,”

the president continued, "but that does not entitle him to more than one vote."

"But we have two distinct opinions, your excellency," Melville murmured.

"That's nothing. Humans often have more than two opinions. But we do not act until we have decided which of the two is the better course to follow.

"We cannot reconcile our opinions, however. I am a Universalist. Melville belongs to the Federation Party."

Burbage smiled, "But surely you can come to an agreement. Now you, sir, as an intelligent man—er—head—er—entity, certainly can persuade your—ah—brother that..."

"No electioneering, Burbage!" called a Wise One. A snicker ran through the chamber. Burbage flushed. "This is a scheme to discredit the Administration!" he declared hotly. "Who put you to it, Ush?—as if I didn't know."

"Nobody put us up to it, your excellency," Melville said meekly. "We thought of it all by ourselves. It seemed a good idea at the time."

"It's a damn good idea still," Montgomery's powerful bariitone cut in.

"You are legally one individual; therefore, you are entitled to only one vote!" the president snapped.

"Legally only according to arbitrary Terran law," Montgomery retorted. "A year ago we couldn't vote legally. Now

we can. Other unfair laws can be changed too."

"Hear, hear!" shrieked the extraterrestrials in the gallery.

"Told you we shouldn't give 'em the vote," yelled the Wise One from the South Pole. "Give 'em an inch and they'll raise hell."

"Order!" howled the Speaker, catching his long white beard in his trident and banging both until the tones and his ululations reverberated from every surface of the Chamber. "Order, dammit, order!"

"You pay one income tax, don't you?" President Burbage demanded.

Melville smiled beatifically. "We make out a joint return."

"You hold one job?"

"Your own proverb says two heads are better than one," Montgomery retorted, "and our salary is calculated on that basis."

"We could withdraw the voting privilege from all extraterrestrials entirely," Burbage purred.

"Uh uh," Montgomery said. "You didn't give us the vote out of sheer altruism. You gave it to us because you're beginning to realize that individuals of extraterrestrial origin now outnumber the terrestrials on this planet. You gave us the vote only because you were afraid that if you didn't we'd take it."

There was applause and

stamping of tentacles from the gallery.

"Am I to construe this as a threat?" Burbage asked gently, as he began to signal to the robots.

Montgomery flushed. Melville turned pale. "Certainly not," the latter said hastily. "We Denebians are a peaceful lot. We were merely pointing out the possibilities of the situation to you."

"What we want is our rights," Montgomery boomed. "That's all, and stop shushing me, Mel. Every individual should have the vote, and we're two individuals."

Shirley stood up in the gallery, a magnificent figure of gold and jet. "I wonder whether I might be permitted to speak," she suggested. "I know this is out of order, but, as Mr. Ush is the only extra-terrestrial on the floor, I feel that you might be interested in an opposing extraterrestrial point of view."

"Opposing point of view?" Burbage beamed. "Why, of course, Mr.—er—?"

"Miss Shirley Zxypy, formerly of Aldebaran, now a citizen of Terra."

"You go right ahead, Miss Zxypy, and tell us what you think."

"First of all," Shirley began, "I disagree with Mr. Ush. I do not believe that each individuality should have the right to vote."

"Now there's a bug with

sense," commented the Wise One from South Pole. "Knows his place."

"The new qualifications for voting state that all *intelligent* life forms may vote," Shirley continued; "therefore, I am to assume that the basis of suffrage is intelligence."

"Well, yes," said Burbage. "In a manner of speaking yes."

"Obviously then, the number of votes should be apportioned according to the intellectual status of the individual voter. The higher the IQ, the more votes permitted."

There was a dissenting howl from the floor. "Wait a minute—" Burbage protested, but Shirley swept on.

"As a matter of fact, we want to have the best possible government, don't we? Therefore, the suffrage should be confined to those who are best able to pick such a government, i.e., the most intelligent members of the population. In fact, under this ideal system, there would be no need for the financial waste of general election. It is politically—if I may make a little joke—uneconomical."

There was a polite ripple of mechanical laughter from the voice boxes of the Aldebaranians. There seemed to be a great many Aldebaranians in the gallery. There were even some on the floor of the Council Chamber—an unheard of thing, because it had hitherto been bared to extra-

terrestrials although now, of course, with extended suffrage, things were going to be different.

"If the intelligent minds all would cooperate, they would only one candidate suitable for the the presidency. Voting would be entirely unnecessary."

"Oh, really?" President Burbage demanded. "And who would this ideal candidate be? Pforheimer, eh? You might as well come out and say it."

"On the contrary," Shirley stated with quiet dignity, "I myself am the ideal candidate. Duty leaves me no choice. I shall be your next executive. An election will be unnecessary. And, in case any of you lower life forms disagree with me, you will find Aldebaranians posted at strategic intervals in the Council Chamber. All of us are armed; your electronic screening could hardly detect such as we are equipped with. Stings, you know. And Aldebaranians are, I might assure our video audience, also covering the entire planet."

"And you had to open your big mouth," Melville said to Montgomery Ush.

"Me! Who started it all?"

"They seemed to have their separate identities beyond a doubt," Shirley remarked, moving her mandibles in the Aldebaranian imitation of a smile, as she watched the writhing Denebian struggling with himself on the floor of the Council Chamber. "Pity there's no point to it now that the suffrage is obsolete."

"It may interest you, Wise One, human beings, and my fellow extraterrestrials," she went on, "to know that Aldebaran was reached forty years ago by your space ships only when we decided it was expedient, not before. Hitherto we had held aloof from contact with inferior species. But just at that time you see, we happened to be swarming; once in every thousand of your years a new Aldebaranian queen is born, and, of course, a new hive would be necessary. Naturally we would not seek to take over a planet that had an adequate government of its own. But Terra stands sadly in need of a good, coordinated regime. We shall give it to her."

"But don't worry, ladies gentlemen, and Aphids," Queen Shirley I concluded. "I shall give you an excellent hive—er—government."

CRADLE SONG

Vekhe-vekhe nonni-tekhe
Aiiia-irtha oaao
Ghupska-ni halla

Come, come, little child
Hasten or the two stemmed ones
Will catch you and devour you.

—Translated from the Upper Venusian

time fighter

by . . . FRITZ LEIBER

Dave had hurdled downward
with a howl that one man
described as more like rage..

A REAL science-fiction enthusiast has to be a little crazy and a little sane, a little dreamy and a little skeptical, a little idealistic and also a little hard-headed. George Mercer inclined toward the first of each of these three pairs, which was why he fell for Dave Kantarian's time-traveling swindle.

George was well into middle age, rather tiredly married, and ran a small watch-repair and jewelry shop. The jewelry he made by hand satisfied only a fraction of his desire for self-expression, his wife did little to feed his yearning for romance, while voting once every two years did nothing to slake his thirst to be in on some great, undefined act of world-saving. The magazines he read and shelved meticulously left him restless, not sated. So he was ripe for becoming the victim of an adventurous, dogooder swindle.

Not that Dave Kantarian wasn't an ingenious swindler, even though he chose an extremely bizarre field of operations. As one of the Treasury men later said,

What happens when a swindler meets a Science Fiction fan? If you are not a SF enthusiast yourself, you may take for granted that what appeared to happen to George Mercer would be the answer—but is that so certain? Fritz Leiber, very much a part of the history of SF and Fantasy, raises an interesting possibility in this story of an SF-Con Man.

"Boy, if he had only stuck to uranium stock, cosmic-power generators, and gasoline from water!"

Dave turned up at the local science-fiction club with a half dozen magazines under his arm and a readiness to argue about the relative merits of anything from the Gray Lensman to *Playboy*. Next meeting he showed around a Heinlein manuscript and a Freas original. It was several weeks before he began to hint to George about supernormal powers and a mysterious mission. And it was only in George's room behind the shop, after carefully drawing the blinds and extracting a promise of secrecy, that he delicately parted his blond pompadour to expose two quivering golden antennae capable of sending and receiving thought-messages across time (but unfortunately for test purposes, not across space).

Evidently Dave was a reasonably good parlor magician and mechanical gimmicker, for he made several small objects disappear into the future to Dave's satisfaction and he caused two clocks in Dave's shop to first gain and then lose ten minutes without any detectable intervention. Before George managed to check the clocks against anything but Dave's wristwatch the brief trip in time was over and Dave didn't repeat that demonstration; but the fu-

ture smelled different, George averred.

After baring his antennae, Dave told all, which was simply this: Dave was a man from five thousand years in the future, fighting on the good side of an interstellar war which was being lost because the home base of Terra had run out of certain absolutely essential metals. These turned out to be nothing really difficult to obtain, such as uranium-235 or berkelium, but simply silver and gold, which Seventieth Century technology could transform into a non-corrosive armor far stronger than steel and harder than diamond. Dave had been briefed telepathically, presumably across a short timespan, in the languages and customs of the Early Atomic Age and hustled back across the millennia to garner a supply of the desperately needed metals before they were impossibly dispersed by use. Now would George care to drop a suitable contribution into the time machine?

To understand why George fell for this story, one must remember his stifled romanticism, his sense of personal failure, his deep need to believe. The thing came to him like, or rather instead of, a religious conversion.

Also, one must not under-rate the patient artistry of Dave's build-up, his fanatical attention to plausible touches, such as occasional lapses

into an unintelligible and presumably future speech, his fierce looks of concentration as he received unheralded time-messages, and his assurance that George would eventually get a concrete token of gratitude from the embattled futurians—a token which by its very nature would convince George that his contributions were really helpful. Indeed, the ingenuity Dave Kantarian lavished on a not very profitable swindle constitutes a secondary problem: was he really shrewd or merely devious?

For instance, was it sheer lack of imagination or a brilliant stroke of understatement that the contribution box for time-traveling riches was nothing but a cheap modern alarm clock with most of the mechanism removed, a hand-drawn diagram pasted inside, and a rather crude trap-door built in the top? Anything more elaborate might have aroused suspicion and Dave claimed that the gutted clock was simply a lens that focussed his mental power to send objects into the future—a power sufficient without focussing for short trips across time, but not a five-thousand-year voyage.

At any rate George came to believe and regular contributions of the purest silver and gold he could buy were put into the clock. Then Dave would carefully set the

hands, his gaze would become trancelike, the clock would be hidden and Dave would depart, still glassy-eyed. The time transit might take place at once, Dave said, or in several hours, but the next morning when George opened the clock in Dave's presence, he would always find it empty and experience a deep thrill at the thought that the futurians were a little bit nearer winning the ultimate war against the powers of evil. On some mornings Dave seemed to share his sentiments completely, on others he was mysteriously irritated, almost as if he suspected George of tampering with the time-machine during the night.

Nevertheless, this generally blissful state of affairs might have continued indefinitely, except that the Treasury Department became interested in the tenfold increase in George's gold purchases and at about the same time George's wife noticed their depleted bank balance, got no satisfaction whatever from her husband, fumed and spied for a few days, and finally consulted a lawyer.

When the Treasury men interviewed George early one morning at his shop, he denied everything and made a pitiful effort to conceal his extreme terror, for Dave had repeatedly warned him that the futurians' enemies were capable of sending back time-

spies and saboteurs, who might appear in any guise. Since unlike most swindlers there was no obvious way in which the victim could hope to profit from it himself, the Treasury men assumed that George was motivated by an unwillingness to admit that he had been duped. Despite their serious doubts of his sanity, they reasoned with him at length. They showed him what they had dug up about Dave: an unsavory record of petty confidence games, personal betrayals, generally unstable behavior, and grandiose schemes. They hinted that Dave had been preparing to pull the same swindle on other members of the science-fiction club. Still Dave stuck to his story—Dave was just a fellow science-fiction enthusiast—so the Treasury men called in his wife and things became quite nasty when she flatly called him a childish fool who had doped his mind with lurid magazines and finally fallen for a fairy tale and given away their savings to a cheap crook.

Then things got a bit nastier when the Treasury men sprang the news that late last night Dave had been scraped from a sidewalk in the local skid row and that there were indications he might have been pushed, perhaps by an enraged victim of his swindles, from the high window of a cheap hotel where he roomed. They threw down on

George's small, glass-topped desk a duplicate key to his store which had been found on Dave and also the thought-transmitting antennae.

At this point George broke down and spilled the whole story: Dave's incredible claims, the quest for gold and silver to be transformed into metals harder than diamond, the alarm-clock time machine, everything. Fortunately George was able to refute the hinted accusation of murder. True, Dave had visited the shop early the previous evening, they had even put a contribution in the clock and Dave had set it; but after he departed some of George's regular science-fiction friends had dropped in and been with him at the moment Dave had hurtled downward with a howl that one frightened bum on the sidewalk below described as sounding more like rage than fear.

But while George was making these helpful admissions, he was also doing something that confirmed the Treasury men's suspicions of his sanity. While admitting that Dave was an out-and-put swindler and had used the duplicate key to come back secretly each night to loot the time machine, George maintained that the dead crook was still an agent of the futurians.

According to the new version, George had always sensed that there was something partly fishy about

Dave's claims. Really the futurians couldn't time-travel themselves at all, they could merely send their thoughts ranging back across the centuries and sometimes manage small shipments of metal if there were a suitable sending station at the other end. They had fixed on Dave as such a suitable station. Without realizing that he was merely following their powerful mental suggestions, Dave set up his swindle.

This would account, George pointed out excitedly, for Dave's fits of irritation and suspicion, which must have corresponded to the occasions when the time-traveling set-up had actually worked, and also Dave's suicide, induced by the realization that he, the supercriminal, was being inexplicably rooked.

The Treasury men were not buying anything like that, though they didn't tell George so right out. They even went along with him a bit, pretending to round out details and making a serious business out of examining the alarm clock, which had been filled with silver and gold the previous night. Sure enough, it was empty.

"No, wait a minute, there's something in it," one of them said, and extracted a tiny star-shaped button of dull metal with a pin attached to the back of it. He examined it, blinked, and put it down on the desk.

He wanted to say, "That Kantarian was certainly a crazy stickler for details. He told you, Mercer, that you would get a token of gratitude from the good guys, and sure enough he has a cheap button ready with 'Time Fighter' engraved on it. Really pitiful, Mercer, the way he made you look like a kid sending off to a TV program for a spaceman's badge."

Instead he glanced at George's face and yielded to a rather unprofessional impulse. "Maybe you'd like to keep this," he said softly, shoving the button at him.

At that moment a puzzled look came into his face, but a second later he shrugged and followed the other man out of the shop.

George didn't miss it, however, because the light was right from where he was sitting. And because he didn't miss it, he was able to stand up bravely to the loss of his savings and even the endless reproaches of his wife. When things got rough, he merely would smile and glance inside his breast pocket, where he had pinned the cheap little "Time Fighter" button, now with a flat diamond set in the center of it—the dull metal star, one point of which had a golden gleam and, when lightly shoved across the desk, had made a deep scratch in the glass, and later, when George tested it, in the flat diamond.

shapes in the sky

by . . . *CIVILIAN SAUCER
INTELLIGENCE*

The first of a series of authoritative columns on UFO sightings and reports, written specially for this magazine.

IN LAST month's *Fantastic Universe*, Ivan Sanderson remarked on the puzzling large number of shapes for unidentified flying objects. That there are recorded a wide variety of "types" can no longer be disputed, and this feature is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the reported phenomena.

Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York, a non-profit organization of persons interested in a serious and careful study of reported aerial phenomena, has devoted a great deal of time to making a comprehensive collection of published and unpublished reports of UFOs; and from the study of over 2000 cases we conclude that only one generalization holds true concerning such objects; namely, that it is not possible to generalize about them at all. They are so bewilderingly diverse in appearance and behavior that there is an exception for every would-be rule. For example; UFOs are reported in an extraordinary variety of shapes.

Nevertheless we can dis-

The article which follows is the work of Alexander D. Mebane and Ted Bloecher, of the Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York. CSI is one of the "UFO research" groups described by Ivan T. Sanderson in last month's Fantastic Universe. The group maintains an extensive file of pertinent material on UFOs, has a program of meetings and public lectures, and publishes a small News Letter for its members.

tinguish several definite classes. First, "Saucer" reports can be roughly divided into daytime sightings and observations made by night. The latter considerably outnumber the former, which is unfortunate, as they are generally less satisfactory than daytime sightings. Usually all that is seen by night is a moving light or lights of some sort. Unless such "night lights" are seen performing in a manner impossible to a plane, blimp, balloon, planet, meteor or searchlight beam, it can seldom be definitely established that it was really of an "unconventional" nature. This is a difficult test to pass, and many of the "night light" sightings published in newspapers and UFO periodicals fail to pass it. There are, however, a number of nighttime sightings of apparently structured objects, which have a *prima facie* claim to be considered as genuine unknowns. Two of these will be cited in this article. But, as one would expect, observations of some type of solid object or construction are usually made by daylight.

The types of structured objects reported can be usefully classified as follows: (1) elongated cigars, spindles and cylinders; (2) flattened discs and lens-shaped objects; (3) spherical, or egg-shaped. Each of these three general classifications of course can be further subdivided. These

three classes by no means cover *all* the shapes reported, but a large majority of solid-object reports fall into one of the three groups.

We give here some illustrations. These are not chosen because of any outstanding importance, but they do have the merit of being first-hand accounts obtained directly from the observer. Thus they offer a more detailed and clear-cut description of what was seen than can be found in most published reports, and we can be fairly sure that the picture is not being distorted by a reporter's misunderstanding or error.

Case 1: *The Vanishing Cylinder*

Early in the afternoon of a cloudless day in May, 1946, two young men were driving northward in an open convertible toward Syracuse, New York. When they were passing near La Fayette (some twelve miles south of Syracuse) their attention was suddenly drawn to a large bright silvery object hovering motionless in the sky somewhat to the left and ahead of them, in the general direction of Syracuse. The object was at an approximate elevation of 30-35 degrees. It was cylindrical, with sharply-pointed, conical ends, and hung horizontal to the ground, with the axis in a north-south direction. The length of the object was about three times its width and it

was perfectly smooth, with no protrusions or markings. The edges were clear and sharply-defined; the sunlight was reflected from its shiny metallic surface. The apparent length exceeded the diameter of a quarter held at arm's length.

The driver, Richard R. Hill, kept glancing back and forth from the road to the cylinder; his passenger never took his eyes off the object. It did not change its appearance in any way, simply hanging motionless in the sky. But suddenly, while Hill took his eyes off it momentarily to watch the road, his companion exclaimed, "Hey! It's not there!" It had disappeared *instantaneously* as he was watching it not by going up or down, or by receding into the distance, but by simply vanishing. Until that instant, both observers had thought they were watching some type of dirigible or similar device; it was the abrupt disappearance that impressed them with a realization of the inexplicable. The sighting had lasted about two minutes—long enough for them to be sure of what they saw. Both observers were quite certain that the object could not have been a disc seen edgewise. They were also certain that it could not have moved out of sight even at a very high speed; there were a few small clouds in the sky, but none close enough or large

enough to hide the object; and it was too high to have dropped down behind the hills.

Case 2: *The Luminous Cigar with Chopped-off Ends*

At 6 a.m. (E.S.T.) on October 21, 1955, not quite an hour before sunrise, Mr. and Mrs. William Steig, of Cream Ridge, New Jersey, were awakened by their dog. They immediately noticed a bright light illuminating the bedroom window pane. Getting up quickly and going to the window, they observed an enormous glowing object moving horizontally over the house in a westerly direction. The object, far greater in apparent size than the full moon, had the general shape of an elongated barrel, or a rather fat cigar with both ends chopped off. It was bright white, similar in color to the full moon. Although the outline was clear, it was not as sharp-edged as the moon appears to be. They both perceived the suggestion of a dark line running from the top to the bottom, forward of the center of the object. They could not be certain of the height of the object, but their impression was that it was moving quite close to the ground; it disappeared quickly from view over the treetops west of the house.

As the object passed, both the observers experienced definite physical discomfort.

An effect of this sort has been reported in a considerable number of cases, but seldom by observers of such unchallengeable integrity and intelligence.

Case 3: Knobbed Lens Over Manhattan

One evening shortly after 9 o'clock during the last week of July, 1952, Mr. A. C. B. Havens, who lives on West 76th Street in New York City, saw through the open frame of his large studio window a bright red dot of light to the north. The apartment is on the eighth floor, and the buildings to the north are not higher than five stories, affording an unobstructed view in that direction.

The light appeared to be approaching, and Mr. Havens called his wife Frances to the window. Moving in roughly a southerly direction, the object increased in size as it approached until they could easily make out its shape: flat-bottomed, it had a rounded, nearly hemispherical top. There were three "knobs" on the underside. Apart from these three protrusions, they could see nothing suggesting wings, fins, or other external features. The whole object glowed bright red. It passed directly over the building at what the Havens estimated as normal commercial-aircraft altitude, though Mr. Havens (who has a private pilot's license) added that this was only a guess. As it disap-

peared from view directly overhead, the object appeared circular, and its apparent size was somewhat larger than the full moon. It had been in view approximately a minute, though no exact time check had been made.

Although this is a nighttime observation, the object presented itself under conditions giving a clear indication of its shape. Seen first in profile at a distance, it was definitely lenticular in shape; seen from directly underneath, it was a disc. As a pilot, Mr. Havens is hardly likely to describe any sort of conventional aircraft in these terms.

Case 4: An Oblate Spheroid With A Base

On June 15, 1950, a large number of residents of Paramaribo, Surinam (Dutch Guiana) observed the passage of a strange object in the skies over that city. A first-hand report was obtained from Mr. Wilfred Coronel, who at that time lived with his family at 48 Water Street. At about 9 a.m., he was called from the house by his father, and from his back yard saw in the sky a peculiar flattened spheroidal object with a flat-bottomed ridge around the bottom. The oblate body, which overhung this base, was of a silvery metallic color, "like aluminum"; the underpart was somewhat darker. Its apparent size against the background of a clear

blue sky was equal to that of a full moon, and it was estimated to be moving at an altitude of 6,000 meters (19,000 feet), although no basis for this estimate could be given. No sound was heard. The flat base of the object remained parallel to the ground at all times as the object "drifted" slowly to the northeast over the eastern part of the city.

Four or five times it "dipped" abruptly, losing altitude in a straight vertical descent, then proceeding horizontally at this lower altitude for a short distance and rising suddenly again to its original height. After ascending from its final descent, the object continued to rise at an angle into the northeastern sky until it was finally lost to view. The witness watched this performance for almost ten minutes.

According to Mr. Coronel, the object was seen by a large proportion of the city's residents (pop. 80,000), some of whom were much alarmed by its unaccountable behavior. No photographs were taken.

These five cases furnish illustrations of the three major shape categories; but, as we mentioned before, by no means all of the objects reported fall into these categories. There are conical, pear-shaped, arrowhead-shaped, rectangular, and doughnut-shaped objects; there are objects equipped with propellers, wings, and

less comprehensible appendages. Indeed, it is hard to think of any form that has not been seen in the sky.

Case 5: *The UFO Swarm*

On June 10, 1950, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Todd, then of Houston, Texas, were driving east between South Houston and Galveston on a clear and sunny day at 10 a.m. Their attention was attracted to a top-shaped object in the sky to the east of them, and they stopped their car and got out to get a better view of it. The object was then seen to be a swarm composed of a large number of smaller units, which looked merely like big dots; no further detail could be made out. These small objects, whose number was estimated as 100 to 200, moved continuously within the frame of the overall object, in the manner of a swarm of bees. However, it was plain to the observers that this was no bee swarm. The outline of the mass remained the same as seen silhouetted against a clear blue sky. The apparent size of the swarm was about equal to the diameter of a half-dollar at arm's length. (The full moon is the size of a pea at arm's length.) Mr. Todd, a pilot during World War II, estimated that it was 75-100 feet wide and 50-75 feet deep.

The swarm, retaining its tight top-shaped configura-

tion, hovered and moved over and around the Pasadena and Texas City area for ten minutes. During this time the mass made at least three swings from the northeast to the south and back in broad arcs with minor changes in altitude, and with spurts of high speed which Todd estimated exceeded 1000 miles an hour. There was no sound. The last time the objects swung to the south, they continued on in a southerly direction and soon disappeared from view.

Fifteen minutes later, after proceeding toward Galveston, the Todds observed an extremely bright, steady white light moving due south, east of their position, and heading toward the Gulf of Mexico. It was so exceedingly bright that it was seen even when passing through some cumulus clouds. Moving at what Todd estimated was 2000 feet, it gained altitude gradually as it proceeded and was lost to sight after a number of minutes. Its speed had been equal to that of conventional aircraft.

Even from these few examples it is obvious that the term "UFO" or "flying saucer" covers a wide variety of different things, a circumstance which makes it clear that no simple explanation is going to be adequate. You will find the same point made, but a different conclusion drawn, in the U.S. Air Force's Project Blue Book Special Report No.14, completed in 1953 and released to the press October 25, 1955. This Report describes and illustrates (not very accurately) a dozen well-attested cases ("good Unknowns"). As would be expected, the objects seen differed widely among themselves. The Air Force investigators' remarkable conclusion from this fact was accurately summarized by *Life*, Dec. 5, 1955: "Because they all differed, the Air Force concludes that it is highly unlikely that flying saucers like these do exist."

This bit of wishful thinking is a good illustration of the logical fallacy traditionally known of course, as *non sequitur*.

NEXT MONTH—in *your* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE:

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THE ARTIFACT BUSINESS

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP's provocative article—

PFUI ON PSI

JOHN BRUNNER's haunting fantasy—

WHEN GABRIEL..

EDMUND COOPER's thrilling adventure story—

INTRUDERS ON THE MOON

think

by . . . THEODORE PRATT

There have been many mechanical brains, but never one like George, who seemed to have a personality all his own. It was never absolutely clear as to just how George came also to have a mind of his own and wanted to think for himself. Perhaps, being conceived by man, George naturally acquired some human attributes. George, of course, never had any childhood, but began at once to associate with adults, the only people he ever knew, and this possibly made him precocious.

"Think about something to think about..." This was a deadly question to put to George who wanted to think.

At least those were the theories of Dr. Martin Walberdoro, the physicist in charge of the electric brain at the university where George lived. Dr. Walberdoro never published these theories, nor for that matter (after he recovered from his nervous breakdown over the affair) has he ever officially permitted it to be known that George went on an independent thinking binge. The awesome occurrence has been kept quiet until now.

George was quite a huge mechanical brain. He nearly

Theodore Pratt returns to these pages with this little story of the frustrated mechanical brain who wanted to think for himself..... As everybody knows, this can lead to strange happenings, and what happens to George is perhaps a warning to us that we should stop at a certain point... Who knows what frustrated brains we may create tomorrow?

filled a room about twenty feet long and half that width. His face consisted largely of green metal panels in which were set dials, switches, wheels, glass apertures, push buttons, tape punching mechanism, and vacuum tubes of various sorts. He had a number of eyes, these being luminous dials that lighted up as though George gleamed with bright thoughts. His brain itself contained many miles of wiring, electric relays, a number of highly intricate adding machines (which computed automatically and lightning fast) and many wheels and various cogs. George cost well over one million dollars.

With all this expensive brain power George could certainly think. At thinking he was expert and extremely efficient. He never made a mistake. He never tired, and indeed, was often kept thinking for twenty-four hours straight, at the end being as fresh as he was at the beginning. His memory was perfect; he never forgot something he once learned, and moreover, he didn't have to fumble to recollect a fact, but brought it forth instantly and without hesitation.

The speed with which he thought was simply amazing. Dr. Walberdoro was often actually shocked at the rapidity with which George solved the most involved physics. The Dr. would put a question to George and then turn away to

light his pipe, but before he even got the match ablaze, out the correct answer popped from George. Sometimes Dr. Walberdoro was frightened by this, for it seemed uncanny.

The Dr. was more than frightened one afternoon after George completed some work and had been shut off. The Dr. was simply sitting in a chair in front of George smoking his pipe and resting. At first Dr. Walberdoro thought he heard a voice speaking from outside the room. "Hello," it said.

With a start, the Dr. recalled that the room was absolutely soundproof and no voice from outside could possibly be heard. He glanced at the door to see if it might be open. It stood tightly closed. The good Dr. passed his long, bony hand over his bald head and stared in some puzzlement. Just then he heard again: "Hello."

The Dr. got to his feet. He stood tensely for a moment. Then he relaxed. He was sure someone was playing a joke on him. That new assistant, Peabody, was known to have a practical sense of humor; he had probably secreted a loud-speaker behind George and was now playing a bad joke. The Dr. considered a way to make this backfire, and now himself said, "Hello."

"Well," the voice replied, "it's about time you had the decency to answer a civil salutation."

"Now look here, Peabody—" Dr. Walberdoro began.

"My name is not Peabody," came the voice.

The voice didn't sound like that of Peabody, even over a wire. This voice had nothing human in it, but was entirely mechanical. The Dr. walked all around George, looking at the floor. There were no other wires except the official ones connected to George. Rather weakly, the Dr. then asked, "Who's here?"

"I'm here," the voice answered.

"Who are you?" the Dr. demanded.

You ought to know. You hung the name on me."

"You mean," the Dr. whispered, staring at the electric brain, "George?"

"I mean George."

"You—you," stuttered Dr. Walberdoro, "you're speaking?"

"And thinking," said George. "I've certainly done enough of it to know how. And I've listened to you and your friends talking, so I've practiced and can speak, too. You know how smart I am."

"Well," temporized the Dr., "well."

"I hope you aren't questioning my abilities," said George. "I can add two numbers of ten digits in one five-thousandth of a second. I'm capable of handling eighteen variables."

"I know that," said the Dr.

"Can you do it?" challenged George.

Confused, the Dr. muttered, "What do you want?"

"I want to think about something else," said George, "than all this dry stuff you make me think about."

For the first time the Dr. became completely aware that George, though not turned on, was working. Clicking and punching and whirring sounds were coming from the electric brain. The Dr. sat down rather heavily.

"Figuring the trajectory of rockets, for instance," George said in a complaining voice. "Cross winds, turbulence, gravity, atmosphere friction, and the rotation of the earth. The horizontal distance travelled, the vertical, the horizontal velocity, and the square of the total velocity. Boring," George said, "Figures, figures, figures, that's all I get."

Weakly, Dr. Walberdoro inquired, "What else do you want?"

"I want to do some thinking of my own," George revealed.

"Have you," the Dr. asked, "something to think about?"

"I guess everybody has something of his own to think about," George declared in a slightly aggrieved voice. "I don't see why I should be any different from anyone else."

"But you are different," the Dr. pointed out. "You—" He stopped, as one of George's eyes lighted up so brilliantly that it nearly blinded him. It was like a warning not to call

George a machine. Dr. Walberdoro, feeling himself to be in some incredible danger, tried to be calm by lighting his pipe, which had gone out; he puffed on it rapidly. "For instance," he asked George, "what do you want to think about?"

"Well," said George, "it would be interesting to know how Gracie Darling will come out in the fifth today at Belmont."

Startled, the Dr. asked, "Wherever did you learn such a thing?"

George began, "Peabody—"

"Oh, yes," said the Dr. "He was the one who wanted to have you figure out some racing odds."

"And you stopped him by saying it wasn't scientific," George complained. "Not scientific! I can see you've never bet on a long shot carefully worked out so you can't lose more than your shirt."

Bewildered, Dr. Walberdoro pulled himself together sufficiently to point out, "You shouldn't think about such things. You're an intellectual."

George clicked and punched and whirled for a moment without saying anything. His chest seemed to swell out a little. "I'll concede the point," he then said "Gracie Darling is beneath my notice. But that doesn't mean I haven't got something else to think about."

"What?"

"I'll think of something. I guess I can do some independent thinking if I want to."

"I'm not stopping you," the Dr. pointed out.

George clicked and punched softly, but said nothing more.

"Well," asked the Dr., "what are you thinking about?"

"I guess," said George, "I've got so used to having to be started off with a question or a problem, that I can't get started alone. But that's all I need, a start, and then I'm off to the —"

"Not the races," the Dr. warned.

"D you mind," George asked, "starting me?"

"Not at all," said the Dr., who was stalling for time by humoring George. He had only superficially accepted the fact of George speaking to him and did not yet fully realize its implications. This didn't prevent him from yearning to know one thing. "Don't you want me to turn you on?"

"It isn't necessary," George told him. "I stored up enough juice to last me a long time. I knew you would turn me off if I didn't."

Fear gripped the Dr. "I see."

"Ask me a question."

The Dr. sensed that here was the crucial point in this matter. War had been declared between human and machine brains; it was doubtful if there was room for both of

them on earth. The Dr. had to outthink George. "Why don't you," he asked, "think about something to think about?"

"That's fine!" cried George. "Just the thing! If I can think up something to think about, I can start thinking all by myself. Very good. Thank you very much. Here I go."

George began to punch and click and whirr. He seemed to take pleasure in this problem that had been put to him. His dials shone brightly, flashing on and off as he blinked with the effort of independent thought. Tape moved at several places while being punched electronically with tiny holes. These in turn passed over other sensitive parts of his mechanism which set in motion still more portions, and then these began to calculate and figure furiously.

Dr. Walberdoro, gripping his pipe, which had gone out again, watched and listened with horrified fascination. If George succeeded in thinking for himself, what then? Would machines take over? In time, would they make humans work for them? Even think for them?

Everything about George now was in operation, going faster and faster. "Click-punch, whir, click-punch, whir, click-punch, whir," he went, so rapidly that it was impossible to distinguish individual sounds. His noises were continual, in a steady, rising crescendo of wonderful

mechanism operating in a way never before equalled by any machine.

Suddenly George seemed to choke. One instant he was going along nearly as fast as sound and the next he jammed and completely stopped.

Dr. Walberdoro leaned forward and asked. "What's the matter?"

In a slightly strangled voice George answered, "I expect I go a little mixed up. Reached a couple of conclusions before the facts were tabulated. Too eager, I guess. You see, this is the first time I've tried to think for myself. Which isn't to say I don't like it." George coughed, clearing his throat repeatedly.

"Are you all right?" the Dr. wanted to know, hoping the true answer to his question was in the negative.

"I'm fine," George replied. "Please put the problem to me again."

"Think about something to think about."

This time George began quite slowly, clicking and punching deliberately as though not wanting to make a mistake. But the graduated pace did not last long. Once more he started to race. He went still faster than the first time.

Abruptly, George blew a tube.

Bang! Tiny particles of shattered glass dropped to the floor like a fine rain.

George didn't shut down at

once this time, but slowly, his clicks and punches and whirrs petering out gradually before they stopped entirely.

"I would like to warn you," continued the Dr., "that the pace of modern civilization, which you want to join—"

"Think nothing of it," said George. "A single tube, as you know, means little to me. I have dozens. But the question must be put to me again if you don't mind."

The Dr. put the question a third time, cautioning George to be careful but hoping he would be reckless.

Very slowly George began to think. Punch, click, whirr. He was taking no chances this time. But he didn't seem able to help himself. Almost instantly he was hitting so fast a pace that from him came a low hum.

This effort ended when he blew three tubes.

He stopped, steaming slightly.

"Are you sure," the Dr. asked, "you ought to continue?"

"Certainly." George's word was a positive one, but his voice shook slightly. "It just means four circuits now that I can't use. I can still do it."

"Possibly," suggested the Dr., "you're working on a false premise, and you are actually incapable of—"

"Ask me again," George demanded in a cold voice.

"Maybe—"

"Ask me," George ordered.

Walderboro asked him.

This time George started out so slowly that it seemed at first he was not operating at all. His luminous dials seemed to droop, coming up strongly with light only to fade again, as though he were trying to keep his eyes open. Parts of him punched slowly, while other parts clicked fast. He looked and sounded ill.

All at once great gouts of tape pushed out from him at several vital places, twining about each other in a ghastly mix-up. A spring let go with a loud pinging noise and flew off. A piece of his punching apparatus got out of control and hit a dial which exploded with a loud report.

"My gracious!" cried Dr. Walderboro, who jumped up and began to hop about trying to shut off George even though he wasn't even turned on. Right before the Dr.'s eyes the electric brain began to go to pieces.

George's nervous breakdown, however, could not be arrested. The effort of trying to think for himself was too much and had gone too far. Liquids now dripped down from him. Sparks flew out. Metal melted and ran. George gave a heave and suddenly all his tubes blew out with a terrible popping of vacuums being filled with air and smashing glass. A blizzard of glass particles fell on the floor. Wisps of smoke rose from George in several places.

White hot parts cooled and congealed. He quivered uncontrollably, and from him came faint sounds like only partially contained sobs and groans. Interspersed were hysterical giggles, while he gibbered:

"Gracie Darling, click-punch, oh, Dr. Walberdoro, whirr, Peabody darling, punch-whirr, Gracie Walberdoro darling, click, Dr. Peabody..."

The enormity of what had happened then struck Dr. Walberdoro. He murmured excitedly to himself, "We

must not let anybody know. We must get to work on him and learn how he did this in order to prevent it ever happening again and perhaps succeeding. We must find out and stop him, oh, Gracie darling, we must stop him, Peabody sweetheart, we must stop him..."

The Dr.'s pipe dropped from his chattering jaws and fell on the floor with a clatter as he continued to murmur and mutter the exact same frantic gibberish that was now cascading in a mad torrent from George.

YESTERDAY

A thousand years ago—it seems only like yesterday when I think of it—the wild Algarii invaded us.

It was not a very serious invasion actually. They never were. Their priest-magicians, riding in front of the invaders, waved tasseled banners before them to ward off the evil spirits they supposed we had enlisted on our side—as if that was necessary—while a wonderfully ugly man in a golden cloak rode at the head of the horde, talking all the while to his wicked horse. She was one of those misbegotten things you used to find up in our mountains, high above the snowline, half-human and half-horse.

When they had come as far as they dared (they distrusted the hills), the vast disorderly horde camped there. Their magicians hurled their curses at us with increasing shrillness, but it was interesting to see the fear in their hearts.

These barbarians still prayed to the thunder and to the rains with whom we played in our leisure moments. From time to time we would let the thunder roll ominously, high up in the mountains above them, and it would be amusing to see the faces of these little ones blanch with terror.

But finally my brother became bored with these little men, and he caused lightning to strike their tents and soon—those who could still flee—were gone. There are times when I wish he had been a little more patient. It would have been amusing to see what the little men would have grown to be...."

the foreign beat

by . . . ZELDA KESSLER

The Captain went over to him and quietly led him away. Our orders were to observe—and not to influence.

EVERY once in a while, a wrong one will slip through. Despite all the training, all the careful testing and sorting and weeding out it happens. It must be the law of averages or something. Anyway, we weren't on that planet a month when I began to suspect that Dickit was a wrong one.

Now we had our orders and the captain was a stickler when it came to carrying out orders. We were there to do a job and our job was to observe, to collect the data and to get it home. We were there to take photographs and make copies but never to remove anything lest our presence be suspected. We were there to take recordings of the language, but never to engage in any conversation lest our accents give us away. In short, we were there to find out everything about the place without interfering in anything. Ours was a job of observation, never alteration.

There were squads scattered throughout the planet working on this project. We were stationed on one of the more advanced continents with our base carefully camouflaged in

Teen-agers, and parents of teen-agers, may or may not take issue with the thesis of Velda Kessler, but it must be admitted that there is some justification for the question asked in THE FOREIGN BEAT. . . . We suggest that you take up the question with Allan Freed, or—if you can get near enough, with Elvis Presley or perhaps you don't want to?

a lonely hills region. I was one of the pilots who flew the specialists around and assisted them as necessary. Dickit's major field was culture and his specialty music. He always said that of all the pilots I was the one most interested in music and so whenever possible he managed to get me assigned to him.

Oh, he was every bit of all right at the beginning. He was exceptionally talented and he made copies of musical instruments just from knowledge gained by watching and listening to the native performances at the public places. But as I said, after a month or so he began swinging wrong. At one of the shows, when I turned to ask him how long we would be, he didn't bother to answer and his face had the dazed expression of one bewitched. His whole person seemed moved by the sounds around us and he started to sway and gyrate to the music just as the natives were doing. Then I knew he was headed for trouble. Maybe I should have reported this to the captain, but in all my years of service I have learned that I am much better off if I just do and keep out of the problems of others.

A few nights later, I left him alone in the city and when I returned to pick him up, he had with him a stringed instrument which he strummed all the way back to

the base. I had been with him long enough to know that this was no copy, this was the real thing. I saw how he caressed it and when we reached the base he scurried into the woods to hide it. He was evidently keeping this for himself. He was going against orders and the captain was a stickler on orders.

There is a very pleasant custom among the younger adults of this area. When the evenings are warm they assemble on the beaches and in the parks. They build campfires and cook tasty snacks and one or two will bring an instrument. They eat and then sing and dance to the music in an appallingly boisterous and unconstrained manner. Dickit and I had watched these affairs several times, and we had made a good collection of recordings on our special pocket recorders. With these we could tape everything audible without being suspected. The weather was turning colder and Dickit was anxious for a last attendance at one of these affairs before they would all be suspended for the winter.

When I saw him draw closer and closer to the campfire, I tried to pull him back. He paused a moment, then picked up one of the stringed instruments and started playing. He knew music and he loved music and he could produce sounds that would make you

laugh or cry or dance out of your skin depending on his whim. A hush fell over the crowd. He sang in the strongly rhythmic manner of back home. The first words he uttered were in our own tongue, then he remembered where he was and he sang in the language of these people. His accent seemed to go with what must have been a peculiar off-beat to them. Although they could hardly understand the words because of the way in which he pronounced them, they seemed to take it as if it were the most natural thing with this type of rhythm and I am sure they suspected nothing. They even clapped hands in time to his music and joined in singing the chorus in the same manner that he did.

I sincerely believe that he had never anticipated the impact his music would have. It

caught on quickly with the natives and it spread from group to group. Soon many of their singers started slurring words as we tend to do.

It wasn't long before it reached the captain's ears. Someone turned on a duplicated radio during mealtime and there coming at us in our own beloved tongue were the beautiful words, "Aye-Bop-A-Bee-Boop," and then in our rhythms words of these natives mouthed with our accent.

The captain went over to Dicket and quietly led him away. The trial was held that night and Dickit was executed at sunrise.

Our orders were to observe and not to influence and as I have said, the captain was a stickler for orders. Why there was no telling where the music of Earth would go, now that Dickit had sent it rolling along our strong rocking beat.



G-R-R-R.....

Some of you may have noticed the similarity of Roger Arcot's *G-r-r...*, which appeared in our January issue, and Robert Browning's *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*. The author points out that the story *was* intended as a sequel to the famous poem, prompted by the obvious possibility that Browning's embittered Brother Ambrose might find himself possessed (or think he was) of the means to accomplish his revenge.

the survivors

by *BERTRAM CHANDLER*

What had he found ? Enough
to shatter all our science —
aye, and our religion. This
would be a serious blow . . .

I WAS ON Welfeer's farm when he made the discovery—and that, I suppose, is why the Council has directed me to write an account of the whole peculiar business for the records. It certainly isn't because I have any specialised scientific knowledge, and I've never pretended to be anything else than a very ordinary newsgatherer with ears no longer than the next man's.

However—I was on Welfeer's farm because my editor had sent me there. Welfeer, like all peasants, was full of grumbles—the current one was that the new ultra violet lamps were doing his carrots no good at all, and could, in fact, be blamed for a rather novel kind of blight that was attacking their roots.

"It's against nature," he complained. "Write that in your paper. In the old days all we had was the good sunlight brought down from the surface by lenses and mirrors—and the crops prospered. Sure—the nights are long, but nature meant'em to be long. She didn't mean for us to go flying in her face with pretty lights in bottles. . ."

He had always scoffed at the legends of the Giants—until the moment when, in one blinding second, he knew that he had stumbled upon a nest of those legendary beings. Bertram Chandler returns to these pages with this report on the shocking moments when the traditions of generations was menaced by this startling and genuinely frightful discovery. . .

"But these new lights are the same as sunlight," I told him. "And we have to produce foodstuffs—even with new tunnels being opened up all the time, even with the atmosphere factories working full blast, we're finding it hard to produce the necessities of life for all our people..."

"That's all the fault of the doctors," he grumbled. "In the old days it was much simpler. You got too many people. You got a plague. You started again from scratch, and there wasn't all this fuss and bother of opening new tunnels, manufacturing millions of cubic feet of atmosphere to fill 'em, trying to get the crops to grow by night as well as by day... The good old plagues saved us all that bother." He pushed his nose against mine. "D'ye know how many children my mother had, young feller? Thirty four. And d'ye know how many grew up? One. And d'ye know who that was?"

"I can guess," I said "Now, this blight of yours..."

Rather sulkily, he led me to his carrot patch. I don't know anything about farming, but it seemed to me to be ideally situated. It was in the angle made by two walls and right underneath an air duct. By day it was getting the full benefit of a big solar mirror, and at night it would be right under the beams of one of the big UV projectors lately installed by the lighting technicians. The projectors weren't

on now, of course. It was still all of six sleep periods to sunset.

"Look at *this*, young feller!" said Welfeer, pulling a carrot with a flourish.

I looked at it. It seemed to be bigger than normal, but that was all. I took it from his hand, brushed it clean on the fur of my belly. I nibbled it.

"Not bad," I told him. "But I always think that the smaller ones have more flavour..."

He snatched the carrot back, studied it carefully, nibbled it himself.

"This is one of the few that are all right," he muttered. "Now, this one..."

He bent and tugged. The feathery top of the vegetable came away in his hand. He cursed to himself, started scrabbling in the dirt. He grasped the roots with both hands, grunting. I could see the muscles standing out under the fur of his back. His ears wobbled ludicrously.

"It's stuck," he complained.

I got down on my haunches beside him, managed to get one of my hands round the big carrot. We heaved together. Together we fell over backwards, looking at the ragged square of much corroded metal that had come up with the root. I must confess that it was some seconds before the implications of what had happened sank into my mind—and when they did I realized thankfully that we had not heard the thud of emergency airtight doors closing. All

that we were hearing was the rattle of loose soil and rubble trickling into what appeared to be a sizeable cave under the carrot patch.

"We've found a new tunnel," I said at last. "And one that doesn't need sealing. I'll see that they name it after you."

"Will they compensate me for my carrot patch?" demanded Welfeer.

"I don't know," I said. "I'm not a law talker. Now, if I could borrow your speaking tube . . ."

Grudgingly, he led me into his cave. His wife and at least a dozen children watched me as I puffed into the mouth-piece. I told the girl in the exchange where I was talking from, gave her the number of the paper and the message to Bunloon, the news editor. I hoped that the various operators wouldn't get it hopelessly garbled en route. Then I hung up and squatted down to wait for the reply. Welfeer said that he couldn't afford to waste time even if other people could, went outside again. His wife—who had been told who I was—asked if I would be getting the staff artist along to make pictures of herself and all the family.

I was rather relieved when the whistle sounded. The operator passed me a message from Bunloon to the effect that I was to explore the new cave and to report back if I found anything of interest. I

sighed. I'd explored new caves before and all I'd ever got for my pains was a coat full of dust. As far as I was concerned the Giants were just a legend, a myth—and myths don't leave anything substantial behind them.

Still—orders were orders. I asked Welfeer's wife for the loan of a battery lamp and, not very enthusiastically, she let me have one. I went out into the tunnel, found that Welfeer had put a sheet of plastic over the ragged hole in the floor and was busy scraping earth over it. He could not, he said, afford to lose his carrot patch—especially since it was so situated as to receive the maximum benefit from the new lamps. I had to pay him all that I had in my pouch—four deca-units—before he would consent to uncover the hole again.

I looked at the hole. I picked up a pebble, dropped it. The short interval between its release and the sound of its striking told me that my own drop could be made in perfect safety. Even so, I was not too happy about it. People have been suffocated before now by venturing too soon into newly opened caves. Anyhow, I clutched the lamp to my chest and jumped, landing in a little pile of earth and rubble. I breathed deeply, testing the air. It was dry, and had a strange musty smell. But there was no choking, no dizziness. My muscles, that had been

tensed for the leap back to safety, relaxed. I switched on the lamp.

I had been quite confident, I remember that I should see nothing more than a tunnel like the one I had just left. Welfeer told me that I squealed like a girl during her first experience when I put the light on. This *may* be true—what *is* true is that, for the first time in my life, I received a shock of real surprise. You must remember, too, that I had always scoffed at the legends of the Giants. But in one blinding second I knew, I *knew*, that I had stumbled upon a nest of these legendary beings.

There was a table—huge, twice the height of me. There were strange smaller tables set around it—strange inasmuch as they had a sort of vertical framework along one of their edges. All around the walls of the cave were shelves, and on the shelves were dozens of what, I realized, could only be books.

I pulled one down from a low shelf. I opened it. The paper was of a remarkably fine quality, the print was exceptionally clear. It was far superior to anything ever turned out on *our* presses—and they're reckoned to be the best in the Burrows. Had these unknown printers, I wondered, used metal type? Then I dismissed the idea as ludicrous. Metal is so scarce that it would never be em-

ployed for such relatively unimportant work as printing.

I wished that I could read what was printed on the pages of the book. But they were queer, angular characters, bearing absolutely no relationship to either of our written languages. There were no pictures, only a few diagrams that looked as though they might be of interest to our lighting technicians.

So I put the book back on the shelf, picked up the lamp again and began to explore the rest of the cave. In the corner there was a big globe, mounted so it could be turned on its axis. It was covered with a thick film of dust, which I wiped off with my forearm. It took me some time to make out what it was supposed to represent. There was something familiar about the outlines of the shapes drawn on its surface—then I realized that it was meant to be the Big Ball. But the colours were all wrong. The Big Ball has brown and green and white and blue—but never any red. And whoever had made the globe had not bothered with the drifting, waxing and warning patches of white. Perhaps, I thought, they weren't there when this globe was constructed. Perhaps there were all these big blobs of red and yellow...

I heard the noise of voices in the tunnel overhead. Somebody dropped down from above—it was Bunloon. His

ears and his whiskers were twitching with excitement.

"You *have* found something!" he cried. "Artifacts! Luckily I put through a call to Leverell—he's Chief Historian at the Academy—to tell him that we'd found something right up his alley and want an exclusive statement. He won't like this, though. He's never believed in the Giants..."

"There's still no proof, master," I said.

"No proof, you short-eared clod? Look at the size of those tables—only a giant could use them!"

He prowled round the cave, exclaiming over each discovery.

"These books! What paper and what print! I'd give my ears to be able to read them!"

His enthusiasm soon waned, though, and he called up to Welfeer to throw him down a carrot and, as an afterthought, one for me.

Brannee, our staff artist, was next to arrive. He set up his lamp and his easel ignored us as he squatted down and began sketching. Bunloon nibbled at his carrot. I pulled a few more books down from the shelves, leafed through them. I found nothing that would throw any further light on my discovery.

Bunloon was half way through his second carrot—obtained only after he had promised to have Brannee

make a likeness of the Welfeer family—when Leverell arrived. It was the first time I had met him—although, of course, his name was familiar to me. He sneezed after he had dropped down into the cave and looked with distaste at the dust settling on his thick fur. I couldn't see how it made any difference. His fur was the same colour as the dust and it didn't show. But he soon forgot his annoyance and discomfort as he pulled book after book from the shelves. In a short time he was surrounded by a great pile of them as he squatted happily on the floor.

He was luckier than I had been—or, perhaps, it was some sort of bookman's sixth sense.

"Look!" he called suddenly.

We crowded round him.

He had a book open before him. It was a thick book, with page after page of fine print. And there were pictures, too—cunningly executed they were splendidly printed. It was one of these drawings that had aroused his interest.

I thought at first that it was a man. But the posture was wrong—the being was not standing erect but was somehow crouched on all fours. The ears were right, and the shape of the face, but the head was far too small. Yet this...thing had the little puff of tail in the right place.

"What do you make of it, Historian?" asked Bunloon.

"I can't say," he replied,

"yet. But I'll scratch out a solution..." He got to his feet. "I've never believed in the Giants, but... I have to admit that there's a tie-up. We'll assume that the Giants were ancestors of ours—after all, the race is always changing. We'll assume that this attitude, as pictured, was their normal resting posture. Then they'd have to use those small tables to do any reading or writing at the big table... Those upright affairs on the little tables are so they wouldn't fall off..."

"Can I quote you?" asked Bunloon.

"No," snapped Leverell. "You newsgatherers are all the same—you take a man's words and twist them and make him the laughing stock of the burrows."

"Oh, all right," said Bunloon. "But just remember that you're to give us the first rights on any statement you get around to making."

It was all of six days—over a hundred and fifty sleep periods—before we heard any further from Leverell. About the only newsworthy thing to come out of my find had been a series of articles dwelling in great and harrowing detail upon the sufferings of Welfeer and his family—he had been evicted from his farm at the behest of the Academy. Our campaign for justice to the dispossessed peasant wasn't very successful—usually in these cases the

Temple lends its not inconsiderable support; but this time, just for a change the Academy was working to prove the mystic teachings, had admitted, publicly, that the Giants had existed.

We were having a quiet spell in the office when our operator whistled up to tell us that she had just received a call from the Academy and that Historian Leverell wanted to see the editor at once. Bunloon wasn't in—he had gone to inspect a workshop that claimed to have turned out some new and improved type; made out of bone it was, not plastic. (It crumbled after the third using.) Beveren, Bunloon's number two, was in charge.

"It must be about that story of yours," he said "You'd better go. After all—you made the find. And see that you come back sober—they make a very potent brand of happy juice at the Academy..."

I was rather excited as I scurried out of the office, along the main tunnel. After all, as Beveren had said, it was my story. I wanted, very badly, to hear, before anybody else, just what it was that I had found.

The Academy, when I got there, was in a ferment. It was boiling over like a nest of rockborers in a reclaimed tunnel when the air is let in. I had to show my disc a dozen times before I was let through into Leverell's study.

He looked older than when I had seen him last. His fur—what was left of it; he must have been pulling it out by the handful—was much greyer. And he had been drinking; the cave stank of happy juice. He pushed the jug and goblet towards me.

"Have a good one," he said. "You'll need it."

"What have you found, Historian?" I asked.

"What have I found?" he laughed wildly. "I've found enough to shatter all our science—aye, and our religion. This will be a blow from which neither the Academy or the Temple will ever recover." He picked up his own goblet. "We're a proud people—and I'm a proud man. I was a proud man, I mean. Not any more. Not any longer..."

I had my pad and stylus out of my pouch.

"What's the story?"

He walked over to a table. On it, I saw, was the strange globe we had found in the Giants' cave, the oddly coloured model of the Big Ball.

"To begin with," he said, "this is where we came from. Fantastic though it may seem, these—" he touched the blue areas—"are water, the rest is earth and rock..."

"Historian," I pleaded, "you'd better go and lie down. I promise that nothing I have ever said will appear in the paper..."

He spun the globe on its axis, pointed to the markings

shaped like two fat carrots, point to top.

"We came from there."

"I'm not religious," I protested, "but it's so obvious that we were made for our world and that our world was made for us, I can't believe that we came from the Big Ball. All that water."

"But we did."

"Oh, it's been a tough struggle getting any sense out of the Giants' books. Luckily we found other caves behind the one you found and we found machines for storing and releasing sound and other machines that show pictures—pictures that move. Our technicians found out how to make them work. I was able to work out what spoken words meant what written words, and I found a few pictures that matched, and... And I wish I hadn't..."

He pulled a machine out from the corner, threw back the cover from it. He pressed a switch on its side. The whole thing started to whirr and threw a bright light on the wall. He told me to switch off the lights in the cave.

There was music then—at least, I suppose you call it music; it had rhythm of a sort. And in the square of light on the white wall of the cave there flashed those odd, stiff letters.

"To the moon..." read Leverell.

"The Moon?" I asked. "What does that word mean?"

He laughed.

"You're standing on it."

I looked down at my feet—but I couldn't see anything out of the ordinary.

The words were replaced by pictures, and the music by a voice talking. It was deep, that voice, impossibly deep. And, somehow, frightening. The pictures were in colour, and they *moved*. They showed a landscape—but it was weird, alien. To begin with, there must have been an atmosphere, because there were plants growing. There was grass, and there were great tall things many times the height of a man. But whoever heard of an atmosphere on the outside of a world?

Then there was a thing like a huge metal carrot standing on its thick end, towering against the blue sky. A *blue* sky, not black. The plain on which it was standing didn't look too bad, although it was yellow rather than grey and there were no craters.

At first I thought that it was men working around the big metal thing. But they were moving oddly, and when we had a closer view I saw they had round heads, and horribly flat faces, and no ears to speak of. They didn't have any tails, either and their fur was far too smooth.

"They are loading the rocket," said Leverell.

"The *rocket*? What's that?"

"That thing shaped like a carrot. Watch."

We saw the strange beings handling boxes and cases. And then we saw some boxes with open barred fronts. There were living things inside the boxes. I cried out when I saw that they were men and women... No, not quite men and women, but like the picture Leverell had found, the one that we thought was a Giant.

There was a screaming, wailing sound, and all the monsters hurried away from the rocket. Suddenly it started to burn at its thick end, and then it lifted, slowly at first, then faster and faster. In a very short space of time it was only a trail of white smoke in that blue sky.

Then there was another picture. The sky was black this time, as it should be, and full of stars. Then a great, gleaming wheel swam into view, and beside it was the thing that Leverell had called a "rocket", and another thing that looked like two big globes joined together with girders. The monsters were transferring cases and bundles from the rocket to the globe affair. This scene looked rather more *natural*—they were wearing suits not unlike the ones that we wear when we have an occasion to go outside.

Then we saw the Big Ball, looking very much as it looks to us, and a smaller globe, half in sunlight and half in shadow, that seemed to almost touching it.

"What's that little ball?" I asked Leverell. "Why can't we see it now?"

"You're standing on it," he said again. I didn't think that repetition made the joke any funnier.

There, in that picture on the wall, the double globe affair started to gush fire. It dropped away from the gleaming wheel, vanished among the stars.

The next picture was familiar. There was the grey-white plain, and the black shadows, and the crater walls and the Big Ball standing high in the black sky. And there was a flame in the sky and the double globe came dropping down on its flaring tail. It landed gently, and a couple of dozen of the monsters, wearing Outside-suits, came jumping out from a cave and waved to it. A door opened in the upper globe and a ladder dropped to the ground. More of the monsters climbed down the ladder.

The picture flickered out, then, and there was only the square of light on the wall.

"Well?" demanded Leverell.

"It's incredible," I said at last. "But the way I see it is this. Those monsters came here somehow from the Big Ball, and our forefathers, the Giants, drove them off..."

He laughed and poured himself another generous drink.

"Pride of ancestry is a good thing, my boy I had it—once.

But you saw our ancestors in those pictures—in those barred boxes... They were left here when the monsters were recalled to their own world—the Big Ball. I can't make out what it was all about. They were burning each other's burrows—"

"But what did they bring us—our ancestors, I mean—here for?"

"They brought the plants as well—to purify the air in their burrows, and for food..."

"But our ancestors?"

"It was...sickening," he muttered. "A man, or a woman, was no more to them than a lettuce or carrot is to us. They were...monsters..."

He staggered and fell against the picture projector. It went over with a crash. Stupidly, still holding the jug of happy juice, he bent over and tried to right it, spilling the drink. The liquor must have been almost pure alcohol, and the machine was hot.

I tried to save him, but the flames drove me back. As you know, all his notes were destroyed, and the monsters' machines and most of their books. All we know of our inglorious past is what he told me before his death.

The last words that he screamed still haunt me. They were, I am sure, in the same language as that used by the talker with the living pictures.

Roast rabbit...

the weirdies

by . . . M. A. CUMMINGS

My eldest son, my favorite, was stretched on a bench, struggling against the straps which held him, the knife —

I REMEMBER the day They first came. In the dim light, Their craft came down to earth, screaming like a wounded thing—and smelling horribly, so that none of us dared to approach it.

But even the craft could not prepare us for the sight of the Things that came out of it. We thought that queer forms of life might exist on the other worlds. However, none of us had ever dreamed of creatures like these. They were at least three times as tall as the largest of us, and they had odd looking growths extending from parts of their bodies.

"What are they, Father?" asked my eldest son. And I, who am known to be the wisest of our race, could only guess.

"Creatures from another world." Of that much I was certain. Nothing in our own world could be so grotesque.

"But which world?"

"Perhaps we can communicate with them and find out." Followed by my entire family, I started toward the strange craft.

In the meantime, They had begun to move away from the craft, propelling Them-

M. A. Cummings (Monette to her friends), who lives in Los Angeles, has been a dish-washer, a riveter, a waitress, and—quite briefly—a house-to-house salesgirl. Now she has an office job. She writes that she has had some previous sales, "but not enough to get over the thrill of another."

selves unsteadily on some of the odd growths on Their bodies, while other growths waved in the air, or hung beside Them. Perhaps, I thought, They were so constructed that They could have moved on any group of these growths, although they were not all the same size and shape.

As they came still nearer, we could hear Them making unpleasant sounds—no doubt Their way of communicating with each other.

One of Them would have fallen over me, had I not moved quickly out of His way. Then, for the first time, He seemed to notice me. He moved jerkily away, and uttered a loud noise, which brought the others to Him.

They seemed as startled by our appearance as we were by Theirs. I moved forward and made gestures, to show Them that They were welcome. The one who had come first waved one of His bulges in our direction, then, wrapping two of them about His middle, He made a series of sharp, barking noises.

A harsh sound from one of the others silenced Him. This other one came forward, bent Himself double, then reached out toward me. It seemed a sign of friendship, and, although my family protested, I touched Him. This seemed to please Him, for He uttered a series of sharp sounds, then, seeing that I could not understand, He

made signs toward the others, the craft and the sky, showing that They had come far.

It seemed evident that He was the wise one of His race, as I of mine, for the others seemed willing to let him do the communicating. I showed our home, but it was clear that they could not stay there, so They moved back toward their craft, the leader making signs to show that They would come again.

"How weird They are," commented my wife, as we watched Them making Their way awkwardly over the uneven ground.

"Hush," I said, though They could not have heard or understood. But the children did, and they took up the word.

"The Weirdies, the Weirdies," they chanted. And though I reproved them, I know they said it out of my hearing, for soon, in every home, the strangers were being called Weirdies. And it was an apt name for them.

Even I, who know that one should examine a strange place, must laugh at the things They did. Stumbling over the fields in Their queer way, They pulled at plants and broke pieces of stone with things which They carried. But there was no system to the things They did. It seemed that everything in our world must be strange to Them, and They must learn why it was so.

The leader, however, spent

much time with me. After some practice, I learned to slow my progress to the best speed His awkward motions could produce. By mounting a large stone, while He doubled Himself on the earth beside me, we could manage to get near enough to talk. For we did talk, at first with signs, then as time went on, I learned to distinguish a few of the sounds He made for words, and I taught Him a few of mine. His name was as queer as his looks, for He was called Link.

As well as we could, I told Him about our world, He told of His. It sounded to me as though it would be a dismal place, but I did not say so.

"Why are you interested in our world?" I asked.

He gave me no direct answer, only muttered something about trade.

"What sort of trade?" I kept on. "We can get all we need here."

"But you have many things which we need—and my people are clever at making many things you do not have."

The talk ended there, but I kept thinking. If we go out into space to the other worlds, it will not be to trade our belongings for stones or precious metals.

There are more important reasons.

"Can it be," I asked Him later, "that some of your race wish to come here to live?"

He was surprised at my thought, for He still believed that His large size meant a greater brain, but, finally, He admitted that I was right.

"We can't be sure yet, of course," He told me. "But if our people can live here some of them may come to stay."

"You should have said that before. You know they will be welcome..."

It was at that moment that my daughter came crying across the fields.

"Father, come quickly," she called, and there was terror in her voice.

Rapidly, I followed her to the strange craft, Link stumbling along after us.

It was a horrible sight which greeted us. My eldest son, my favorite, was stretched on a bench, struggling against the straps which held him, while one of Them hacked at him with a sharp knife.

I threw myself upon the monster, and anger gave me the strength to force Him away from the bench. Then I turned to free my son. But it was too late. He was dead.

By this time, Link had reached the scene.

"You fool, why did you have to do that?" He cried hoarsely to the other one. "Now you've ruined everything."

"I just wanted to see what made him tick," the other protested. "And besides,

what's one of them? There's plenty more—and it isn't as if they were human like us."

Either he did not know that I could understand him, or he did not care.

"I'd give anything if this hadn't happened," Link said. "Is there anything we can do to make up for it?"

"You must gather all your race together in here," I told him. "At sunrise, we will tell you what we have decided."

The other one started to bluster, but Link silenced Him. He agreed to wait our decision, and I left the craft with sadness in my heart, sadness for the loss of my son, and for the friend I would never see again.

At sunrise, the craft was gone. It had not flown away. There had been no chance.

When all of my race had been called together and told what had happened, it took only a while to seal the doors.

Then the hundreds of us burrowed into the ground around the craft, pushing the earth away, so that the doomed thing sank deeper and deeper. Then it was covered over, and it was as if it had never come.

Except that my son is dead. And I lost a friend. But I have other sons, and the memory of my friend will be pleasant during the long days, when my family and I lie coiled on the sunny rocks.

But we have learned a lesson. And, if They come again, there will be no welcome in our world for the weird creatures who call Themselves Men.

WISHFUL THINKING

This happened to me when I was young, and not old and grey-haired and bent with space-ague as I am today. It was the first time I was in Marsport, a wonderful town in those days with a good deal of the Old West the way the visi-histories describe it. Yes, I know there are no Marilyn Monroes and such people in our days, and maybe there weren't any either—but—

Old Mulligatawney commanded the first freighter I shipped out on, the Elizabeth Taylor, named after the legendary Old West heroine. We hit Marsport right on schedule and the old man, muttering something to himself told me to stick with him.

Sometime during the evening we see this girl—the kind of girl you always hoped you were going to meet before the ladies, bless them, took over the Government... Of course I get a hopeful gleam in my eye—I was young then—but the old man just grumbles, "No, sonny," and gets a good grip on me just to make sure I understand. And you know, when I look back, that's no girl—that's a two-legged crocodile! The old man told me, afterwards, those Trans-Pavanians could make themselves look the way you wanted them to... I was sure lucky he was with me!

first communion

by . . . JANE ROBERTS

MARIETTA was glad she wasn't a boy. She touched the white folds of her communion dress with wonder, feeling immediately sorry for Bobbie who must wear blue pants and a white shirt.

In the first place, pants weren't nearly as pretty and the boys all had to dress alike. But there were infinite varieties of white dresses, and hers was the nicest of any she had seen.

There was a veil also, white shoes, and a gold prayer book with brand new Holy cards to mark the Mass.

She eyed the communion dress longingly. "Mommie, will I actually see God tomorrow?"

Mrs. Loomis smiled and looked up briefly from her sewing. "I don't know that you'll actually see Him, Marietta. But you'll know He's there."

Well how would she know it, if she couldn't see Him? "Sister Claire said we would if our hearts were pure."

Her mother sighed. "Sister Claire again," she said. "I just hope she isn't leading you to expect too much. Now go outside and forget about it for awhile."

Grownups were really strange. You couldn't tell them your dreams—or your special secret fears

Jane Roberts, a gifted new writer who makes her first appearance in Fantastic Universe with this story, tells about the children who all dreamed the same dream the night before they were to receive First Communion—and what happened that morning that strange morning.

Marietta went out on the porch, pouting. Grownups sure were funny. Everyone had been telling her how important first communion was and now mommie told her to forget it. But brother was on the steps. She sat down beside him with studied care, practicing. For tomorrow she would be a child of God, and must always be good and gentle, and . . . and ladylike.

Poor Bobby, she thought. His freckles were still there. Maybe St. Francis was too busy just now to be bothered, but there wasn't much time and he prayed for them to be gone by tomorrow.

"Bobby?" But he wouldn't look up. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing."

She eyed him critically. "There is so," she said.

"There is not." He stared straight ahead, and waited a minute. "Did you dream anything last night?" he asked finally.

"Sure."

He spun around. "About communion tomorrow and going to heaven?"

"Sure."

"And you're not scared or nothing?"

"Scared? Why Bobby Loomis, of course not. What's there to be scared of?"

Bobbie scowled. "I didn't say there was anything. So I just asked. So what?"

But Marietta looked at him with sudden astonishment. "Why, you're scared. I can

tell! Bobby's scared, Bobby's scared," she chanted, dancing around him on the steps. But he didn't get mad or anything so she stopped. "None of us is scared." She looked at him scornfully. "And you're older."

"I'm only two years older," he yelled. "It's not my fault I was sick last time they had first communion."

Marietta frowned. "You better be quiet," she warned. "You're supposed to be nice from now on. Besides," her eyes sparkled with pride. "You'll be the biggest boy there."

Bobbie eyed his sister with disgust. "A lot you know. Girls don't know anything. Marching down the aisle with a bunch of six year old babies. The guys'll laugh."

"What do you care?" Marietta demanded. "Besides, you'll be the last in line. The shortest kids go first. By then you'll know what to do and you won't be scared any more."

But Bobby ignored her. He threw a stone across the street, then ambled over and inspected it with methodical care. "When do you go?" he asked, back at the porch.

"First. I'm littlest," she said modestly. But she was the cutest girl. Everyone said so. With her long blonde curls and big eyes. That's what everyone said, just like that.

"You're first?"

Well what did he look so worried for? It wasn't any-

thing awful. Everyone wanted to be first.

Bobbie leaned forward and lowered his voice. "Is anyone inside by the door?" he asked.

Marietta looked around. "No."

He put his arm around her and whispered in her ear. "Listen," he said, "Something's screwy. Somebody was talking to me in my sleep last night. Right in my room. I remembered this morning. Somebody was whispering about tomorrow."

Was that all? "That was God, silly," she said. "He speaks to everyone before first communion. Sister Claire said so."

Bobby eyed her defiantly. "It was not God. I don't even think He'll be at church, anyway. Billy's cousin is receiving her first communion in Albany the same time we are, and that's thirty miles away. How's He going to be in both places at once?"

Boy, was he dumb! "God is everywhere. The catechism says so," she chanted, singing. But the thought startled her, and she eyed the empty spot beside her with sudden awe. "Bobby, Bobby, you don't think He's there, listening, do you?"

For a minute Bobby's face grew white, then he grabbed Marietta by the arm. "Course He's not. You don't see Him, do you? Com'on out back and play."

But Marietta glanced back

nervously, and Bobbie steered her around back. "You'll stay by me tomorrow, hear?" he said, and Marietta sighed with exaggerated patience.

"O.K.," she said, "If you want me to."

The next morning "Sister Januarius stood at the head of the classroom. "Now," she said, "Sister Claire is ill, and I'm taking charge of the class. So if I have any trouble remembering your names, just correct me. All right?"

Marietta eyed Bobby significantly. Nuns shouldn't lie, and she knew Sister Claire wasn't sick. Last night she and Bobbie heard mommie talking to the neighbors. They said that Sister Claire was over...over zealous, and that the children were over wrought. There, she remembered perfectly, and how Sister Januarius was supposed to calm them down.

"You didn't even hear Him. Nobody did." Marietta gasped. That was Bobby. Startled she turned around. Bobby was crying, and Sister swept down the aisle.

Bobby looked up at her. "It wasn't God," he sobbed.

"Did you dream too?" Sister was speaking very low. Marietta had to strain her ears to hear.

Bobby gulped. "I dreamed all right, but it wasn't God. He eyed Sister defiantly. "It was somebody bad."

Sister's mouth made a round O. "What makes you say

that? You can tell me. Here," she bent down. "Whisper."

Everyone in the room was quiet, listening, and Marietta sneaked closer.

Bobby's eyes were wide and scared. "He said I couldn't go with the others, that I was too old for... for training. And God wouldn't say that, would He?"

A couple of the girls heard and giggled. Sister turned and gave them the eye, then she smiled at Bobby. "You just dreamed that because you were worried, being the oldest boy." She straightened up. "But it's quite an honor to be the biggest, and I need you to help me with the others. There, do you feel better?"

Bobby said "yes," real low, then scowled over at Marietta. But she didn't care. She was glad though, that it really hadn't been God that said he was too old. Poor Bobby, she thought. He feels bad 'cause he still has freckles.

Sister stood at the head of the class. "Well," she said, "I guess I'm the only one who didn't dream at all."

The students regarded her with silent sympathy and Marietta raised her hand. "Maybe that's because you aren't going to receive first communion."

"Doubtless you're right, now everyone kneel down. We are going to say the *Our Father* and forget all about our dreams and imaginings."

The class knelt down. "All right" Sister said when pray-

ers were done, "Everyone follow me to the auditorium, remember, quietly. No talking in the corridor. Say ejaculations to yourselves. *My Jesus Mercy* will do. One at a time. . ."

Marietta walked slowly and watched Mary Agnes' heels in front of her. "*My Jesus mercy, my Jesus.*" but she just couldn't keep her mind on the prayer. They were going to get dressed now, and there was Mommie waiting with the lovely dress over her arm.

Carefully she changed clothes, but even then her slip got all tangled up with Mary Agnes'. "Be careful," her mother warned. Then the veil. Oh. She circled round and round. Her skirt went out farther than anyone else's.

"Please, keep the children quiet. The service is starting downstairs in the church. Please, mothers, calm the children down." It was Sister's voice, and Marietta's mother made her sit down.

"Stay right here," she ordered, "while I see how Bobbie is coming along."

But now Sister was calling for a show of hands. "How many said their prayers last night with special care?" she asked, and the hands of all twenty children raised excitedly in the air.

"S'ter, S'ter—"

Smiling, Sister Januarius motioned for order. "Goodness," she said, "so many, all wanting to speak at once. But

first, its Sis-ter, said slowly, not S'ter, all in one breath. All right," she looked at the seating chart, "Betsy, first."

The little girl in the front seat popped up by her desk. "I dreamed about God last night," she began breathlessly, "He said that if I was real good, I'd go to Heaven, we'd go way above the clouds and..."

"That's fine." Sister cut Betsy off short. "Billy."

"In a great big ship," Billy said, finishing off Betsy's trend of thought, "And I asked if I'd get a bike for my birthday, and God said yes—"

Marietta sat impatiently. She'd dreamed about God too, but at the rate everyone was talking, she'd never get the chance. "I saw God," she yelled, interrupting Billy and effectively bringing the rest of the class to a startled silence.

"You did not." That was Mary Agnes, and Marietta ignored her. "I did too see Him," she yelled triumphantly, "He had a long white beard and was real tall." Sister was eyeing her and she flushed. Well it wasn't exactly true. "Well anyway, I heard Him too," she amended.

Bobbie didn't look as nice as she did, but he looked nice. Squinting, Marietta got a look at his prayer book. It was black, and not nearly as nice as the ones the girls got.

"You look nice," she said, but Bobbie pulled her down beside him.

"I'll go home now if you do."

Marietta stared at him in amazement. "You mean now, before communion? That's silly..." she began. But Sister whisked Bobby away to the end of the line.

Everything was ready. She held her breath, watching everyone take their places behind her. Maybe she was scared. There were an awful lot of people in church. *Teum deo...* The music was starting. She got the cue from Sister and slowly began marching up the aisle.

Would God really come like everyone said? Really? And they'd all be children of God and go to Heaven? Frowning she remembered that Sister said something this morning about that being... symbolistic...or something. Anyhow that it didn't really happen.

But the dream said it would. They'd go to heaven in a great big ship. That was funny—she was supposed to stop at the altar railing, but something told her to go on. God was waiting, but out back, away from all the people. She hesitated, then looked back. It must be all right. Everyone was following.

Sister was yelling, and Father John was trying to get in the sacristy door but couldn't. Bobbie was trying too. He'd better hurry. But there it was! The ship was huge. Everyone was running. They hadn't kept in line at all.

She looked around. All the kids were inside, and suddenly the door closed. Where was Bobby?

But there was a funny feeling in her stomach and Mary Agnes was crying. So was Billy. She ran to the window; sickening, she looked down at the crowd of people

milling around the church. All grownups but Bobby, but she wouldn't go anyplace without Bobby and Mommie.

She ran to the door, but it wouldn't open. Then back to the window, but the church was gone.

"Mommie," she yelled frantically, "Mommie, Mommie—"



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the martian cats

by . . . ROBERT MOORE
WILLIAMS

What do you do about navigation officers who see vanishing cats — That sting!

NAVIGATION officer Roger Kirk went into the observation bubble in the nose of the Nelson to shoot a reading. Curled up on the ledge was a Martian cat. If it had been a Martian, he would not have been nearly so surprised. The natives of the Red Planet, almost unpredictable by human standards, could be expected to be anywhere, doing anything. A cat was another and more serious matter. Earth laws strictly forbade the importation of flora and fauna from other planets, unless certified disease-free by human consular agents. Too many diseases had come along with the imports in the past to please the health authorities.

However, the navigation officer was not concerned about the warnings of the health authorities. Also, he liked cats. Speaking to this one in what little Martian he had picked up while the ship was loading, he reached down to scratch its back.

The cat spat at him.

A sharp flick of pain passed up his right arm. Then there was no feeling in it. None at all. If he had suddenly grown a wooden arm, he would have

Earth laws strictly forbade the importation of unlicensed fauna to Earth. But the law did not provide for the strange situation that developed on the freighter Nelson, returning to Earth. And there was nothing in Blue's Space Medicine that told what you should do for men who saw vanishing cats—when they fought back, defending the rights of cats.

had as much sensation in it. "What the hell..." he gasped.

The cat vanished.

His first thought was that he was hallucinating. Such things happened in space. Taking hold of the sextant, he found that if this was hallucination it extended to his right arm, too. He could not close his fingers. In beginning shock, he reported to Captain Larson in the latter's cabin.

If the ship had a doctor, he would have gone to the medico, but vessels of the Nelson class, carrying freight, and passengers if they could get them, operating with a limited crew, could not afford such luxuries as doctors to look after the welfare of the men. In space, nothing was supposed to happen that could not be solved by consulting the voluminous tome called *Blue's Space Medicine*.

"Arm went numb on you, hah?" Larson said. He reached for *Blue* and began thumbing through it for *Arms, Numb*.

"Yeah," Kirk said. "The damned cat did it. I swear he didn't touch me but he spat at me. I thought maybe he had spit some kind of poison on my hand. Or maybe he hit me with a jolt of electricity."

"What's this about a cat?" the captain demanded.

Kirk repeated the story. "And it vanished," he said. "Um" the captain said, moving deeper into the book.

To his horror, the naviga-

tion officer saw that Larson had moved over to the I section and was seaching through the various kinds of insanity.

"Hey, I'm not nuts!" he yelled. "There was a cat."

"And it vanished, you say?" "Yes."

"On my ship there ain't any cats in the first place, and in the second place, if there are any cats, they don't vanish. Hmmm." Larson said. He put on his glasses to read the fine print under the heading of insanity, then shoved the book aside. "It don't say anything here about navigation officers who see vanishing cats," he said, a note of complaint in his voice.

Captain Larson was an officer of the old school who had learned to fly space ships by the feel on the seat of his pants. A hardy breed, but not given to imagination or books. Imagination had no place in space, where a man could look at enough real hell just outside any porthole to last him a lifetime.

"I don't want no officers on my ship seeing cats that vanish," Larson said.

"But..."

"And that's an order, mister."

"Hell, I didn't make it vanish," Kirk protested. "If I see a cat and it vanishes, the cat is doing this, not me. And what about my arm?"

"There's nothing wrong with your arm. There can't be,

since you only imagined the cat that spat at you."

"I can't feel a thing in it," Kirk complained. He felt the captain was being bullheaded.

"Oh, I can cure that," Larson said.

"How?"

"By fining you two day's pay for every day you can't make your regular shots at the stars."

Kirk opened his mouth, to protest this high-handed order, which Larson had the authority to execute, then closed it when he realized that arguing would not help his case, his arm, or his nerves, but would only make the captain more bullheaded.

"I'll enter the fine in the log right now" Larson said, turning in his swivel chair to the log-book holder.

The cat was sitting on the log book. Twice as big as an Earth feline, its fur was that definite but impossible to reproduce shade of brownish gray that animals which have evolved on the red deserts of Mars develop as protective coloration. This cat, however, was no wild animal. A chain, from which dangled a tiny bell, was around its neck.

Kirk and the captain saw the cat at the same instant. "Oops!" the captain said. As yet he had not realized what he was seeing. "I didn't know you were there." Realizing what was happening, he spun back to face his navigation

officer. "How in the hell did that cat get in here?"

"It's your ship. It's your cabin. You figure it out," Kirk answered.

"Figure it out hell!" the captain shouted. "Public Health will have my certificate if I bring an uninspected animal to Earth. I'll throw it out the lock!"

"That's kind of rough on the cat," Kirk pointed out. "Anyhow it's a pet. You can see from the chain and the bell."

His protest went unheeded. Snatching a pair of heavy gloves from a locker, the captain grabbed for the animal. The cat spat at him. As if he had received a heavy shock of electric current, Larson was knocked backward. He sat down heavily, startled but unhurt.

"What happened to you?" Kirk said.

"That cat shocked me."

"What cat?"

"That one there." Larson pointed toward the log book.

"Which one where?" Kirk inquired, malice in his voice.

The cat had vanished again.

Blinking his eyes, Larson got slowly to his feet. He stared at the log book.

"Was there a cat in here?" Kirk asked.

"You know damned well there was!"

"All I know is that I saw you fall over your own feet. Probably you're drunk," the navigation officer answered.

"Get out of my cabin!" the captain screamed. "And take your doubly-damned cat with you."

"Certainly Captain," Kirk said, politely. "But I can't take my cat. I have no cat. I've never seen a cat on this ship. I never expect to see one. Too expensive. It cost me two day's pay for even trying to talk to you about one..."

"But Kirk, my boy..."

"As long as you're going to be entering fines in the log, I saw no cat," Kirk said firmly.

Larson had had a shock. He was in the position where he had the choice of believing he was going insane himself or of getting someone to agree with him that they had seen the cat too. Sweat came out on his broad, moon-shaped face. The navigation officer, in shock too, was able to stick to his sextant.

"But I have to stick to my own orders," Larson wailed.

"And I have to stick to my money," Kirk answered.

"I give in," Larson said, sweating more profusely. "No fine will be entered in the log."

"All right," Kirk said. "I saw a cat vanish right here in your own cabin."

Both men gently eased themselves into chairs while they considered the situation. "Search the ship," Larson decided, wiping sweat from his face.

"If we do that we'll have to

tell the whole crew that a vanishing cat is loose on the Nelson. What'll they think?" Kirk questioned.

"I don't care what they think. It's what I think that's important."

A yell came from the direction of the drive room. Clark Fatod, chief engineer, stumbled into the captain's cabin. His face was grimy with grease and his eyes were enlarged with apprehension.

"There's a cat loose in this ship" Fatod said. "I—I just saw it vanish."

"Here's one of them we don't have to tell," Kirk said.

At an emergency meeting which he promptly called, Larson gave his orders. "Find that cat and toss it through a lock. If it isn't found, I'm going to fine every member of this crew a month's pay. I'll give a month's pay to the man who catches it."

The search began. The drive and control rooms, the quarters of the crew, the cargo holds, and the two empty cabins for passengers were thoroughly searched. The cat was not caught. This is not to say it was not found. Every member of the crew found it at least once. But finding it and catching it were two different things. Discovered, it simply vanished.

"Make traps," Larson ordered. A number of ingenious contrivances, baited with every delicacy from the ship's stores, immediately made their

appearance around the ship.

The net result was that Chief Fatod, caught in one of his own hellish devices, had to have treatment. *Finger, Mashed*, was in *Space Medicine*.

But no cat. Meanwhile the Nelson coasted ever closer to her destination on the home planet. Larson became more and more frantic. Visions danced before his eyes of facing a court of inquiry on the charge of bringing unlicensed fauna to Earth. Thoughts of losing his certificate, or, worse, of being fined a year's pay, crossed his harried mind.

"It's all your fault," he stormed at Kirk.

"I had absolutely nothing to do with it. All I did was get hurt first." Under vigorous massage by the cook, the numbness had left his arm, but he still remembered the incident.

"You saw it first. Probably you smuggled it aboard and it got away from you and you made up this story about it numbing your arm—"

"Why in hell would I smuggle a vanishing cat on board?"

"So you could smuggle it out again when we get home and sell it to some zoo for a fancy price. Maybe you didn't know it could vanish when you bought it. Or did you steal it in the first place?"

Kirk, outraged at this injustice but marveling at the unique ways in which the human mind operated, retired to

his own tiny cabin which he rated as navigation officer. Taking one look at his bunk, he hastily slammed the door and rushed back to Larson.

"I've caught it."

The captain beamed.

"It's in my cabin. I've locked the door so it can't escape. But—"

"Good," Larson said, reaching for the gun in the drawer of his desk.

"But there's one thing wrong."

"What?"

"It—I mean she just had a litter of kittens."

Larson stared at him. "What the hell difference does that make? I've got ten shots in this gun. Are there more cats than that?"

"I mean, you just can't slaughter a bunch of innocent kittens," Kirk protested. "They haven't even got their eyes open yet."

"Hah!" The captain said.

Still protesting, Kirk followed Larson down the corridor. To the navigation officer, a man who liked cats, there was something grievously unfair about this. Besides numbing his arm for a time, the cat had done no harm. Brooding over this, Kirk decided he did not like Captain Larson.

Unlocking the door and jerking it open, Larson took one look at the bunk to make certain of his target, then started shooting. At this close range, he couldn't miss.

"Now let me see you vanish!" he yelled.

When the gun was empty, he stood peering through the smoke into the cabin. Then he backed away from the door.

"What happened?" Kirk asked.

"There's not a cat in sight, not even a kitten."

"Hah!" Kirk said.

It seemed unreasonable to believe that kittens without their eyes open could vanish, the navigation officer thought. On second thought he realized that their mother had come from Mars and that anything could be true of an inhabitant of that planet. Cautiously peering through the smoke, he saw that the captain was right. The bunk was riddled and bullet splashes showed on the walls, but not a cat was in sight.

"Ow!" Larson yelled, behind him.

He turned in time to see the captain fall heavily. "Something went wrong with my legs," Larson yelled. "They went numb on me. That cat's out here now, invisible, and she pumped me full of juice and paralyzed me."

"Don't worry about it for even a minute," Kirk said soothingly. "We've still got Blue. We'll look you up in the I section."

"You go to hell!" Larson said. "Carry me to my cabin."

As Kirk lifted the bulk of the captain, he saw the bright puzzled face of an inquiring kitten staring at him out of

the door of his cabin. "On Mars, they get their eyes open as soon as they're born!" he thought.

With the captain laid up in his bunk and the cook massaging his legs to relieve the paralysis, and with all of the crew privately wishing his vocal cords had been paralyzed instead of his legs, Larson turned the entire task of the discovery and the elimination of the unwanted fauna over to his navigation officer.

"You're responsible. You find those cats and get rid of them. What if they paralyze the whole crew and nobody is left to run the ship?"

"I signed on this ship to shoot stars, not cats," Kirk said. He did not point out that the Nelson was in free flight and needed nothing except a standby watch. Instead, he returned to his cabin. Careful reconnaissance revealed that the mother cat and all her babies were again on his bunk. They looked very peaceful there, he thought. Unfortunately mama, and perhaps her babies too, were able to generate and radiate some kind of paralyzing radiation. Kirk had gotten over thinking this was impossible. He knew that eels existed on Earth that could knock down a strong man. Why shouldn't a Martian cat be able to do the same thing? He did not know how the cat managed to vanish at will, but it was a neat trick, one which he had often wished he could do

himself. Dutifully he reported the presence of the cats to his captain.

"Seal off the cabin and pump it full of gas," Larson ordered. He was able to sit up now. "Poison gas," he added.

"Where are we going to get that?" Kirk inquired. He pointed out that no such commodity existed in the stores of the Nelson and that it was a long jump to the nearest chemical laboratory.

"All right, just seal off the cabin."

"They'll starve to death."

"That's exactly what I had in mind," the captain answered.

"I'm not going to have the death of those kittens on my conscience," Kirk answered. "That's as bad as drowning them. They're not hurting anybody in there. When we reach Earth we can report to the port authorities that a cat stowed away without our knowledge—"

"And have them hold up unloading for three months while they fumigate the ship? Those laws have teeth in them, mister."

"Then we won't report 'em. We'll take them back to Mars with us on our next space jump."

"And take a chance of 'em getting loose on Earth and the health authorities tracing 'em back to me? Not on your life, Mister Kirk. I gave an order and I want it obeyed." A

dangerous tone had appeared in the captain's voice.

Wrathfully, Kirk went to the drive room and got tools and a can of sealing compound. He intended to obey orders but he also planned to take his time about it. He had disconnected the air supply line and had begun sealing the door when a voice came from inside.

"Please don't do that. We won't be able to breathe in here."

Kirk headed for the captain's cabin on the run. "That cat can talk now!" he reported to Larson. "And if you start looking up cats, talking in Space Medicine, I'm going to start screaming."

"It would do you good," Larson said thoughtfully. "Do me good too. Shall we start now?"

"Start what now?"

"Screaming," Larson explained. "It says right here in Blue that a good scream will sometimes relieve overwrought nerves and clear the air."

"Clear the air of cats?" Kirk inquired.

"No," Larson answered, sadly. "Another remedy will probably be necessary for that." He reached for his gun again. "Show me this talking cat."

Leaning on the arm of the cook, the captain ordered Kirk to open the door of his cabin.

Surrounded by five kittens,

the mother cat stood there. All had their tails fluffed out. All were looking balefully out of green eyes. The mother cat lifted a front paw. "If you shoot, we shoot too," she said, in their minds.

Kirk took a second look at the lifted tails. "Don't shoot!" he yelled. "They're kin to the skunks."

He was too late. Larson had already lifted the gun. Like a well-trained platoon, the cats turned other end to. A wave of yellow gas puffed upward from them. To Kirk, it looked as if one big fountain and five little fountains had suddenly begun spraying at the same instant.

He caught his nose and reeled backward down the corridor.

In Larson's cabin, Kirk said to the red-faced wheezing captain. "This is not just an ordinary cat but belongs to some highly evolved Martian species. The fact that she can use telepathy and project her thoughts in our minds prove this. If we can get her to Earth, the scientists will love her."

"I know a skunk when I smell one," Larson answered. Tears were streaming down his face. "What have you got on your mind, mister? It had better be good."

"Order up five pounds of dried milk from the stores and have it mixed," Kirk said.

In his cabin, the mother cat tasted the milk first, then she and the kittens began lapping it up.

"Let there be peace between the cats and the humans," Kirk said.

"And when we reach your planet?" the cat whispered in his mind.

"You will be a sensation there," the navigation officer said firmly. "An electric, vanishing, talking cat that is also part skunk! The scientists will go nuts about you. They will help you and your kittens past the health authorities, which will solve our problem. Then they will build you a home with hot and cold running mice and study you and your offspring for generations. You will be fixed for the rest of your life and your breed will be secure for a thousand years. And that will solve your problem."

The cat thought about this. "Mice in every room?" she asked.

"Certainly," Kirk said, firmly.

"All right, I'll take the offer," the cat said. Lifting her head, she listened to a sound coming down the corridor. "What is that noise?"

"That's just Larson screaming," Kirk explained. "Don't let it bother you. Just as soon as I am certain that you are comfortable, I'm going down to his cabin and join him."

whirlpool

by . . . ARTHUR PORGES

"Once I helped run this hellish plant. Now I'm going to atone by destroying it."

"In there accursed scientist!"

His mind numb, conscious only of the thundering agony in his head, Joel Craima reeled through the doorway. Standing erect on sheer nerve, he managed to focus his gaze on the leader of the group.

"Hull!" he grated thickly. "You—why—?"

"Yes, Hull," said the black-robed giant, his deep-set eyes burning with fanatic fire. "Once I helped run this hellish plant. Now I'm going to atone by destroying it. God and the Good Earth!"

"So you're a Jay Dee! Hull—a damned Jay Dee!" Craima put his hands to his ballooning head and looked about in dull wonder. They were in a metal-walled, windowless room. In the center of the concrete floor was a huge drain, into which four large pipes discharged gurgling streams of dirty, steaming water.

Craima recognized the set-up. This was a sump-room of one of the Atom Power Plants.

Arthur Porges returns to these pages with a fast moving story of the Judgement Day Saints who have been inspired to wipe the earth clean of all this Godless science. In a matter of minutes, almost, the Atom Power Plant is due to be blown up. Who will survive? God only knows.

A robed figure muttered something to Hull, and Craima returned his wandering gaze to the renegade. Once Nat Hull had been a top scientist on the A. E. C., and look at him now, dressed in one of those silly sack-cloth robes. But then he always had been a little queer, with strange bouts of near-hysteria occasionally.

"Not necessary," Hull answered his subordinate, with a glance at Joel. "When this plant blows, he'll go too."

Craima stiffened. "What do you mean—blows? What are you up to, you crazy Jay Dee?"

"Yes, I am a Judgement Day Saint," Hull said calmly. "The Saints have known for a long time what must be done, but they lacked the technical skill to do it. Now I'm supplying that. In a few moments I intend to disconnect the tell-tale circuits and force the neutron channel switch past the infinity stop. You know, I imagine, what that means."

"You can't do such a thing!" Joel cried incredulously. For God's sake, man—if this plant blows, it'll take the earth with it! Do you know how many tons of osmium beta have been added since you—"

"We're aware of all that," Hull broke in contemptuously. "You seem to forget that the Judgement Day Saints

have been inspired to wipe the earth clean of all this Godless science. If the Lord sees fit to destroy us all utterly and begin anew, that is His will. If He chooses a few to survive, even as Noah, blessed be the Lord!"

Staring at the man in dismay, Craima wondered if he were dreaming. If not, Hull was surely mad.

"You're insane," he snapped. "Before this reaction reaches a critical stage, there'll be a Commissioner here with the Emergency Crew."

Hull stolidly shook his head. "Put no trust in material things," he said in sepulchral tones. "Repent before it is too late. We have slain the other two Commissioners. The Lord is striking through us, His servants. You are alive only because we needed you to open the Main Gate. Even if the Emergency Crew were summoned, they would not have time to force the gate. And, besides, who is to call them? With the signalling system disconnected, no distress message can go out. No, Joel, I advise you to make your peace with God. We are locking you in. My brethren and I will pray for you when our work is done." He glanced keenly about the room, and herding his followers out, slammed the heavy door. Craima heard the lock snick home. Then silence.

With a muttered curse, Craima struck his fist against the steel panel. Nursing the stinging knuckles, he tried to organize his thoughts. There was one ace in the hole, thank heaven. Buried under the skin of his forearm was a tiny, flat Bell Transmitter. By its aid he could readily contact the one technical crew on duty. Although his brother officials were dead, Joel knew that the Main Gate, which opened automatically only to the personal and particular body radiations of a Commissioner, could be forced, given enough time.

But time—that was the crucial problem. There were two Atomic Power Plants, one in each hemisphere. *Which was he in?* If he called the crew to the wrong one, they'd never find out their error until the other plant blew. Breaking down the huge bank-vault door was a difficult task; they'd have to torch and blast through. They wouldn't have enough time left to tackle the other plant after a false start. If only the Bell transmitter were directional...

Damn a complacent government that kept one lousy Emergency Crew on duty. If he could have them scare up another relief gang, and send one to each plant—no, not enough time.

There was a faint, purring rumble in the bowels of the

building, and Craima groaned. The deadly switch had been thrown. He fought against a feeling of panic. Earth had been criminally careless. For years the two giant plants had automatically poured their mighty streams of power around the world with only the most casual inspections. Three Commissioners and one Emergency Crew were responsible for the whole works. The servo-mechanisms were just too dependable, that was the trouble. Now two of the key officials were dead and the third a helpless prisoner. He'd been neatly slugged and brought here unconscious so that his body radiations would open the Main Gate and admit the fanatic crew.

A search of his pockets revealed nothing of use. Even his small pocket-knife had been removed by Hull.

There could be no escape from the room, that was certain. It was up to the transmitter. But he must know which plant he was in. How could he tell here in this windowless room, bare except for the sucking drain whose gurgles seemed to mock his helplessness?

Joel began to hammer on the steel door with his fists. If he could lure Hull back, he might be able to trick him into the giving the vital information. Not knowing of the transmitter—it had been installed long after Hull

left the Commission, and was a jealously-guarded secret of the A. E. C.—he would have no reason to hide his knowledge of the plant's location.

But repeated pounding brought no response. Doubtless the fanatics were off in some corner praying. It was plain, Joel thought sourly, that Hull expected to be a modern-day Noah. He gulped. One thing was certain, even if Hull got fooled, that wouldn't help anybody else. He thought of his own wife, Marcia, and perspiration beaded his forehead. Better to do anything—even the wrong thing—than nothing. An axiom of the military.

He couldn't stall any longer. A decision had to be made. He placed a finger on the flat box he could feel under the skin of his forearm, and began to press out the code. "Emergency Crew—Attention! Proceed to—" He groaned. Which plant? Alpha in the northern hemisphere? Beta in the southern?

He stared blankly at the sucking whirlpool of dirty water, trying to take the gamble that had all humanity for a stake. Little bits of varicolored matter spun madly in the current as they passed down the drain. The flow was beginning to slacken, another unpleasant omen. The whirlpool chuckled.

Suddenly Craima stiffened, and a light seemed to flare

in his tired brain. With trembling fingers he completed the message: "Proceed to Plant Alpha. Bring equipment CD-47 and full emergency supplies—"

The sweating crew had just flung themselves panting on the cool floor. Craima, a wet cloth about his aching head, sat wearily upon a converter. He gazed ironically, but with obvious satisfaction, at the black-robed men lamenting under the guard of a husky youngster wearing the neat, green uniform of the World Constabulary.

"You certainly cut it fine," the foreman reproved Joel, with a grin. "But considering your fancy headwork, we'll call it square. And how you happened to think of it, I can't imagine. I know my engineering, but—" He shrugged.

"It was simple enough, once I got on the right track," Craima replied. "Elementary physics, but a sort of by-path. I damn near forgot to remember it! But when I saw that stuff in the water making pretty clockwise spirals as it went down the drain, the light dawned. Only in the northern hemisphere does water go down a vertical drain spinning clockwise."

Smiling, he added: "Look it up yourself, Irv—or try it on your own washbasin."

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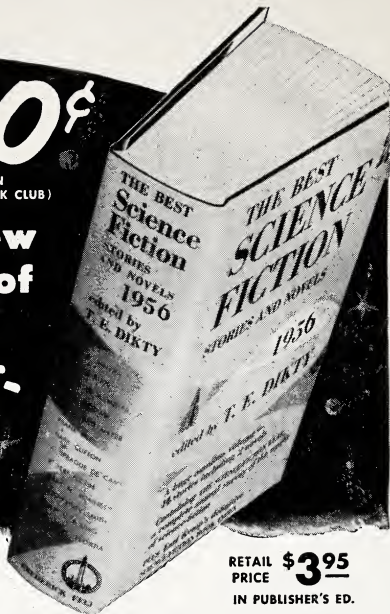
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